

THE Nation.

ZERO HOUR FOR CLIMATE ACTION

COPENHAGEN AND BEYOND

A SPECIAL ISSUE WITH
MARK HERTSGAARD • BILL MCKIBBEN
CHRISTIAN PARENTI • MARIA MARGARONIS
SALEEMUL HUQ • HOLLY WREN SPAULDING
& ROBERT S. ESHELMAN

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Letters

Afghanistan & Obama

LEWISBURG, PA.

Congratulations on the excellent coverage of Afghanistan and Pakistan in your November 9 special issue, "Obama's Fateful Choice." Counterinsurgency has fascinated Western policy-makers since at least World War II, but it has almost always failed. The reason is simply that we and other defenders of indefensible regimes can never "be to the people as the fish is to water," as Mao Zedong said. Even George Will recognizes that. It is tragic that President Obama is temporizing. He's apparently going to send more troops, which is just a recipe for more death and destruction: we cannot win, but if we send enough troops, we can stave off losing.

JOHN PEELER

BOULDER, COLO.

The several authors in your recent special issue on Afghanistan agree that Obama's stated goal of defeating the terrorists is not achievable, and all suggest different routes to withdrawal. But watch: the Obama administration will not withdraw. Why? For the reason mentioned by none of your analysts, all apparently having accepted the administration's "anti-terrorism" story: it's all about (again) control of gas and oil; in this case pipelines. The administration has set the frame, and your analysts are running around within it. The Great Game goes on.

ROLF KJOLSETH

GOLETA, CALIF.

What is missing in this forum? Any discussion of what is good for the people of Afghanistan. It is false to say there is no way to help them. From the 1950s until 1979 the Soviets built schools, roads, hospitals and a secular society with rights for women. It was US support for the jihadi extremists that ended this progress and destroyed Afghanistan. The debate should be about how to help the people rebuild. To get back to creating jobs, building schools, hospitals, transportation and a government respecting human rights for all. We should do this not because it is best for us—it is—

letters@thenation.com

but because it is the right thing to do.

ROBERT BERNSTEIN

'Feline' Hostility?

CUTTINGSVILLE, VT.

I'm not sure what Corey Robin means by Isaiah Berlin's "feline hostility to the left" in his review of Quentin Skinner's *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* ["The First Counterrevolutionary," Oct. 19]. "Graceful"? "Ungovernable"? "Independent"?

Probably not. Robin seems determined to turn Berlin into a Hobbesian by quoting him without citation or context, and portraying as definitive Berlin's carefully qualified remark that freedom "is not incompatible with some kinds of autocracy." Berlin's personal experience as a cultural attaché in the Soviet Union would have led him to a different conclusion; in 1946, immediately after Berlin visited Anna Akhmatova, Stalin banned publication of her work, citing her contact with "spies" from the West. And, of course, Berlin was aware of Stalin's persecution of other writers—Mandelstam, Babel, Bulgakov—and cat-and-mouse relationship with Pasternak.

Berlin's later definitions of "negative" and "positive" freedoms led him to see the dangers of unrestricted state intervention in individual lives; unlike many cold war liberals, he never became a neoconservative but was skeptical of political extremes on the right and the left.

JOAN ALESHIRE

SAN FRANCISCO

Corey Robin errs badly when he calls the divine right of kings a recent innovation promulgated by James I (recent in 1650). Divine right is all over Shakespeare. In *Richard II*, written about ten years before James became James I, a king is "the figure of God's majesty, His captain, steward, deputy elect, Anointed...." Indeed, the concept of divine right goes back at least to Homer: kings like Agamemnon have a right to rule because Zeus has cho-

(continued on page 34)



Beyond Copenhagen

President Obama's recent words, uttered with Chinese President Hu Jintao at his side, sounded a welcome note for those concerned about climate change: even though the

goal of reaching a legally binding agreement at the upcoming UN Copenhagen summit remains out of reach, the president said, "our aim there...is not a partial accord or a political declaration but rather an accord that covers all of the issues in the negotiations and one that has immediate operational effect." This statement was an important step. Nonetheless, many obstacles—chiefly stemming from continuing US intransigence—still stand in the path of a successful global agreement.

Whatever happens among the officials gathered in Copenhagen, climate activists are using the occasion to explore new directions. In this issue we look at how the world can move forward after Copenhagen, including ways to develop clean energy and to adapt to a hotter planet.

The international stalemate is partly a result of the North-South divide, separating wealthy countries from the un- and underdeveloped world. The South wants the North to make the sharpest emissions reductions: rich economies played an outside role in creating the crisis, they argue, so they should pay the bigger price. The North demands that developing economies make similar commitments, despite their struggles to industrialize. The inability to resolve this tension reflects the inadequacy of political systems—both globally and in countries such as ours—to respond to the task before us. If a clean energy revolution is to occur in the South, rich countries must provide funding as well as technology. But US politicians show little support for "climate reparations." China has called for industrialized countries to devote 1 percent of their GDP—about \$350 billion annually—to help the South go green. So far the United States is prepared to give only \$1.2 billion. There are

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North-South differences on the science as well. Most large economies say an atmospheric CO₂ concentration of 450 parts per million and a global temperature rise of 2°C are tolerable. But poor nations—particularly low-lying island nations, which will suffer most—are demanding that atmospheric CO₂ levels be returned 350 ppm and that global average temperatures be held "as far below 1.5°C as possible."

The world needs the United States to play a constructive role. But despite powerful voices like those of Al Gore and 350.org founder Bill McKibben (who reviews Gore's book on page 15), our public discussion has been warped by coal and oil industry-funded "climate skeptics." Even in the unlikely event that decent climate legislation is passed here, the Senate would need a supermajority of sixty-seven votes to ratify a Copenhagen treaty—votes that simply aren't there.

During his campaign Obama spoke eloquently of green recovery, but since his election he has not aggressively pushed this agenda. Given the scale of the challenges he has faced, from healthcare to Afghanistan to the recession, this might be understandable. But the Obama administration has the power to act responsibly on climate change outside legislative channels. It is considering approval of an EPA finding that would classify greenhouse gases as dangerous, opening the way to their regulation under the Clean Air Act. The administration could use its regulatory power to shutter coal plants and clean up agriculture, and embrace industrial policy to facilitate a clean energy revolution. While the United States must be part of any international agreement that addresses this global crisis, the fight against climate change begins at home.

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Amy Traub: Getting tough on exploitation

Roberto Lovato: *Justicia poetica* for Lou Dobbs

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SlideShow Enemies of healthcare reform

Climate Change Subsite

More coverage and archival material, at thenation.com/climate-action

American Justice on Trial

Attorney General Eric Holder's decision to try Khalid Shaikh Mohammed and four alleged co-conspirators for the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in a civilian criminal court has prompted widespread derision from the right. They argue that 9/11 was an act of war carried out by enemy combatants, not civilians, and war crimes must be tried in military courts, not

COMMENT

civilian courts; that a civilian trial will provide an unparalleled propaganda platform to Al Qaeda; that the civilian rules of evidence are too demanding for prosecuting the enemy; that a public trial risks disclosing military secrets; and that the trial will make New York City a prime target for Al Qaeda supporters.

The critics are right that trying high-level Al Qaeda members will be an extraordinary challenge. Some of those challenges will be more difficult in a civilian criminal court. But trying KSM *anywhere* will prove extremely difficult. And it is the actions of the Bush administration that have in large measure forced the Obama administration to try KSM in civilian criminal court.

The 9/11 attacks were an act of war *and* a heinous crime; the two are not mutually exclusive. The UN and NATO recognized the US right to respond militarily in self-defense. But the perpetrators of 9/11 were criminals, not warriors—they targeted and killed 3,000 innocents. Both acts of terrorism and war crimes (of which targeting civilians is the pre-eminent example) can be tried in civilian federal courts. Indeed, the War Crimes Act provides jurisdiction in civilian courts for just such crimes.

There is undoubtedly a risk that a trial in civilian court could provide a platform for KSM and could disclose military secrets; but so, too, would a military trial. In either setting, the United States would need to conduct as much of the proceeding as possible in public and allow KSM to present a defense—otherwise, the verdict would be widely dismissed as illegitimate. And in both settings, procedures exist to close portions of the trial to the public when necessary to preserve national security. There will be many hard judgment calls—but they would not have been any easier to make in a military courtroom.

The rules of evidence in regular military courts-martial are not in any significant measure less demanding than in civilian courts. While ad hoc military commissions do provide greater leeway—for example, by allowing hearsay—putting someone to death based on hearsay would raise serious constitutional questions in either venue. In any event, convicting KSM, who has openly and eagerly admitted his role in the attacks, should not require hearsay.

A trial at Guantánamo would unquestionably have been more secure. But it is the Bush administration that foreclosed that option. By dismissing the rule of law and the Geneva Conventions as an inconvenient obstacle, exploiting what it thought was a "law-free zone" and subjecting detainees to inhumane treatment and torture, the Bush administration made Guantánamo the best propaganda Al Qaeda could ever have hoped for. Injustice and Guantánamo have become synonymous the world over. If we are to try the 9/11 perpetrators without handing Al Qaeda another propaganda victory, the trial must be fair beyond question. After

Noted.

CITIZEN HIGHTOWER: Each year, the **Puffin Foundation** and **The Nation Institute** recognize an individual who has challenged the status quo through distinctive, courageous, imaginative and socially responsible work. The previous recipients were environmental activist **Van Jones**, human rights lawyer **Michael Ratner**, *Democracy Now!* host **Amy Goodman**, educator and author **Jonathan Kozol**, journalist and author **Barbara Ehrenreich**, professor and anti-death penalty advocate **David Protess**, labor activist **Dolores Huerta** and civil rights pioneer **Robert Parris Moses**.

Jim Hightower is the ninth winner of the prestigious award. An advocate for everyday people whose voices are seldom heard in Washington or on Wall Street, Hightower believes that “politics isn’t about left versus right; it’s about top versus bottom.” He broadcasts daily radio commentaries, which are on more than 150 stations across the country, on subjects ranging from public healthcare to **Hamid Karzai**. Each month, Hightower publishes a populist political newsletter, the **Hightower Lowdown**, exposing hypocrisy in Congress and targeting the abuses of corporations. With more than 135,000 subscribers, the *Lowdown* has received both the **Alternative Press Award** and the **Independent Press Association Award** for best national newsletter.

Twice elected Texas agriculture commissioner, Hightower was praised for nurturing organic production, promoting alternative crops, regulating pesticides and monitoring groundwater. A *New York Times* bestselling author, he has written seven books, including his most recent, written with longtime partner **Susan DeMarco**, *Swim Against the Current*.

Perry Rosenstein, president of the Puffin Foundation, hails Jim Hightower as “a frontline defender of our civil liberties. Swimming against the current is a challenge he welcomes at all times.”

FROM THE LEFT COAST: The surge of 17,000 troops **Barack Obama** sent to Afghanistan earlier this year—and the prospect that he might further expand the

occupation—has unsettled a lot of Democrats. Those concerns were formally expressed November 15, when the **California Democratic Party’s** 300-member executive board overwhelmingly endorsed a resolution calling for “a time-table for withdrawal of our military personnel” and “an end to the use of mercenary contractors, as well as an end to air strikes that cause heavy civilian casualties.” In place of a continuing US military presence, the California party urged Obama “to oversee a redirection of our funding and resources to include an increase in humanitarian and developmental aid.”

Party activists worked with **Progressive Democrats of America’s** Healthcare Not Warfare campaign to secure support for the resolution by highlighting clips from **Robert Greenwald’s** *Rethink Afghanistan*, as well as testimony from former Marine Cpl. **Rick Reyes**, an Afghanistan vet, who says, “There is no military solution.... The problems in Afghanistan are social problems that a military cannot fix.”

Backers of the plan are urging other state parties to join what they see as a movement to influence Obama’s priorities. “Yes, this is about Afghanistan—but it’s also about our role in the world at large,” says California Congressional candidate **Marcy Winograd**. “Do we want to be global occupiers seizing scarce resources, or global partners in shared prosperity? I would argue a partnership is not only the humane choice but also the choice that grants us the greatest security.”

JOHN NICHOLS

CLIMATE CHANGERS: As we approach the December 7-18 **UN Climate Change Conference** in Copenhagen—the world’s last chance to secure an emissions reduction agreement that will replace the **Kyoto Protocol** before it expires—activists are channeling their energies at the UN talks and beyond.

According to scientists, 350 parts per million represents the maximum amount of CO₂ that can safely exist in the atmosphere. Any more than that, and we’re screwed. At **350.org**, founded by **Bill McKibben**, you can find out more about the science behind the number, sign up for action alerts, help plan upcoming actions and add your name to the 350 pledge,

which will be delivered at Copenhagen.

Rising Tide North America (risingtide-northamerica.org) is also a good resource for direct-action organizing—something scientists like **James Hansen** and politicians like **Al Gore** now see as necessary—providing speakers, training and workshops. The group also educates on the root causes of climate change and debunks the fallacies behind proposed market-based solutions.

Gear up for November 30, the tenth anniversary of the WTO Seattle shutdown, with **Mobilization for Climate Justice**. Putting social justice at the center of the debate, it highlights the need for real, non-market based solutions that protect those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change: people of color, low-income and indigenous communities. The group will be staging a nationwide series of nonviolent direct actions targeting “corporate climate criminals.” See actforclimatejustice.org.

The **Energy Action Coalition** (energy-actioncoalition.org) is a US-based online community of young environmental organizers striving to leverage collective power and create change for clean, efficient, just and renewable energy. Its regional PowerShift conferences have become important annual gathering places for activists to share ideas and strategies.

The **Campus Climate Challenge** pushes colleges and universities to become models for the clean energy revolution. One tactic is to get university presidents to sign the Presidents’ Climate Commitment. So far, more than 600 schools have signed on. For resources for students seeking to push the challenge at their schools, check out climatechallenge.org.

Long-running international environmental giants **Friends of the Earth** (FOE) and **Greenpeace** continue to work around the issue of global warming. Greenpeace offers a robust climate change action center, and FOE’s demandclimatejustice.org implores Obama and other heads of state to take bold action at Copenhagen. **Oxfam’s** Copenhagen campaign at oxfam.org.uk offers ways to get involved in demanding “an ambitious, fair and binding” climate deal. For an expanded version of this article, including links and video, go to TheNation.com/blogs/actnow.

PETER ROTHBERG AND ANDREA D’CRUZ

the taint that the Bush administration's tactics have created, the only place to achieve that is a civilian criminal court. DAVID COLE

David Cole is The Nation's legal affairs correspondent. His most recent book is The Torture Memos: Rationalizing the Unthinkable.

Why Not Tax Wall Street?

Washington is experiencing a rare and disorienting moment. Big ideas for financial reform that have languished for years are suddenly gaining momentum. Instead of taxing folks to clean up after reckless Wall Street bankers, why not tax Wall Street? Instead of tolerating behemoths regarded as "too big to fail," why not break them up before they do more damage to the country? Instead of genuflecting before the mysterious Federal Reserve, why not strip the temple of its secrets and cleanse it of the self-interested bankers who shape Fed policy?

The fact that these and other unsanctioned propositions are in play and even proposed by respectable figures indicates how deeply the established order has been rattled by the financial crisis. It also demonstrates that members of Congress who bailed out the bankers with public money are quite terrified of voter retribution in the next election.

The center is not holding. That's good news for the Republic, because the center has long been subservient to the demands of

financial power. Cynics will say this is a passing tempest that will come to nothing. They might be right. But reformers should make the most of it, at least to agitate the fears of elected politicians—including the president.

Welcome to Mardi Gras, Washington-style. It feels like carnival time, when up is down and down is up, when humble folks parade as kings and queens and the reigning royals are dressed as clowns. As someone who has written about these heretical ideas for decades, I feel a bit giddy at the opportunities for real change, though mindful that the anarchy may not last long.

The most startling evidence of reversal is Chris Dodd, chair of the Senate Banking Committee, who has been a loyal friend of Wall Street and especially Connecticut-based insurance companies. Dodd proposes to strip the Fed of its regulatory functions because of its "abysmal failure" to protect the public, and to replace it with an overarching regulatory administration. Dodd is no doubt motivated by his weak prospects for re-election next year. Still, he earns courage points for violating the longstanding taboo against criticizing the central bank. Likewise, Senator Richard Shelby, the ranking Republican on banking, wants to eliminate bankers' insider influence over regulation at the Fed.

Taxing Wall Street is a more provocative departure, but some representatives are warming to the idea, drawn to Oregon Representative Peter DeFazio's appealing Let Wall Street Pay for Wall Street's Bailout Act. A very small excise tax on all financial transactions—trading stocks, bonds and derivatives—could yield hundreds of billions in revenue. House majority whip Jim Clyburn suggests the securities tax is "a painless way" to pay for highways. Clyburn asks, "If you're Goldman Sachs, if you're making all this money, if you got all this federal money [in a] bailout, and you are paying all these big bonuses to your folks, where is your contribution to this recovery?" Good question.

Senator Bernie Sanders asks another one. If some banks are "too big to fail," why not just make them smaller? His bill would require Treasury to identify and break up too-big financial institutions within one year. Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan Chase are reacting with alarm. They do not normally worry over the senator's progressive thinking, but what's dizzying is that former Fed chair Alan Greenspan has embraced the same concept. When the socialist from Vermont achieves bipartisan consensus with the right-wing Maestro, can Barack Obama be far behind?

The president wants to govern from the center, but the center keeps moving leftward on him. If he doesn't catch up soon, he'll be in trouble.

WILLIAM GREIDER

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

On CEO Lloyd Blankfein's Statement That Goldman Sachs Is 'Doing God's Work'

On every seventh day the Lord can rest.
He knows that Goldman Sachs will do its best
To work away at that for which He'd hanker:
A pot of dough for each investment banker.

As He looks down at us from high above,
The Lord's not interested in peace and love
And such as that. The Lord has got this itch
To see the Goldman Sachs folks filthy rich.

He wishes they had more than what they've got—
Another house or two, another yacht.
His hopes for these to whom he gave the nod:
More money, as the saying goes, than God.

The China Debt Dance

Shanghai



As Barack Obama touched down in China, the American press seemed to settle on a single story line. The president, wrote the *New York Times*, will be "assuming the role of profligate spender coming to pay his respects to his banker." And the *Wall Street Journal* highlighted "China's Blunt Talk for Obama," about US economic policy and the "nervousness" expressed by Chinese

leaders that “huge U.S. budget deficits will weaken the dollar and slash the value of China’s massive foreign-currency holdings.”

The karmic symmetry of this state of affairs makes for an appealing fable. The once mighty United States, which for decades used the IMF to impose its will on the domestic policies of developing countries across the globe, is brought low by its profligacy and forced to beg sufferance from the miserly Chinese.

But just a few days here in Shanghai (on a trip sponsored by the China-United States Exchange Association) has convinced me it’s bullshit and the Chinese know it.

“There’s an old Chinese saying,” Yang Jiemian, president of the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, told me. “If you borrow a hundred dollars, you are borrower; if you borrow a million dollars, you are not borrower.” There’s an English version of this, which is a bit zipper—“When you owe \$100,000, the bank owns you. When you owe \$100 million, you own the bank”—and it aptly describes the US relationship with China, which holds approximately 70 percent of its 2.3 trillion foreign reserves in dollars.

“Both the Chinese and Americans are in the same boat,” says Yang, whose brother Yang Jiechi is the Chinese foreign minister. “Chinese has always been trusting the United States. We say the dollar is as good as gold. In Chinese we don’t say ‘US dollars’; we say ‘US gold’—*meijin*.”

Now that they’ve amassed more than \$1 trillion, the Chinese can hardly risk precipitating any kind of worldwide sell-off by moving to get rid of dollars en masse. They’re like the action hero in the movie who steps on a land mine, hears the click as it engages and then can’t move, lest he blow himself up. Furthermore, the Chinese seem intent, at least in the short and medium terms, to continue driving growth by exporting products to the United States (and holding down the value of their own currency), which means they’ll continue to amass dollars into the future. In other words, they’re stuck with us.

This state of affairs has created some popular disgruntlement in China. “Chinese government is under great pressure” from its citizens, says Yang. “Why do we continue to buy these bonds?” *Currency Wars*, a wildly successful bestseller by a Chinese Ron Paul figure named Song Hongbing, asks that same question, and argues that the United States is planning to devalue the dollar massively and screw the Chinese out of billions in wealth. (His solution: buy gold.)

But if domestic Chinese concerns about the country’s monetary codependence with the United States explain some of the statements of the country’s leaders, they don’t explain why the US media and commentators seem so intent on giving the story maximum play.

The answer to that, I think, is politics. It’s increasingly clear that China has replaced the bond market as the nebulous specter that fiscal hawks will use to justify domestic austerity. In the 1990s Bill Clinton was persuaded by Robert Rubin and others that the deficits he inherited required him to abandon any extension of the welfare state, lest interest rates go through the roof and the economy into the tank. He was urged to balance the budget, which he did, prompting James Carville to quip: “I used to think if there was reincarnation, I wanted to come back as the president or the pope or a .400 baseball hitter. But now I want to

come back as the bond market. You can intimidate everybody.”

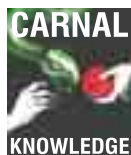
Of course, we still have a bond market, but the fiscal hawks don’t talk much about it these days. That’s because despite all the borrowing, interest rates remain low. So instead, fiscal hawks have attempted to outsource their browbeating to the Chinese, often referred to as our “biggest creditor,” even though China holds only 22 percent of foreign-held US Treasury securities. (The majority is held domestically.) In June Illinois Republican Mark Kirk bragged during a talk at the Center for Strategic and International Studies that on a recent trip to China he’d told Chinese officials that “the budget numbers that the US government had put forward should not be believed. The Congress is actually gonna spend quite a bit more than what’s in the budget, and the healthcare bill probably being the lead driver of additional spending by the Congress.” This bizarre bit of self-sabotage makes sense only if you recognize that Kirk is hoping that panicking the Chinese will boomerang back to the States and whack Obama’s domestic agenda.

The fact is, giving in to bullying by Kirk, CNBC’s Larry Kudlow, New Hampshire’s Judd Gregg and the rest of what some have rightly called “the pain caucus” would only further deepen the economic misery in the United States and sour the US-China relationship. “In short term we are very worried about the domestic politics of the United States,” says Zha Xiaogang, a fellow at the Institute for Economic Comparative Studies, who focuses on US-China relations. “We can expect the US unemployment rate will stay high, and will possibly cause US domestic political pressure” for what Zha calls “protectionist” measures.

The odd and in many respects dysfunctional US-China relationship was crafted by the elites of both countries and always runs the risk of being undermined by a populist backlash. (That’s why groups like the China-United States Exchange spend money to fly journalists to China to promote “cooperation.”) But what is in the interest of the millions of Americans and hundreds of millions of Chinese who haven’t had much say in shaping their countries’ strange codependence is an economic recovery whose benefits are broadly shared.

CHRISTOPHER HAYES

Red Scare, Black Scare



It must have been about the time that Barack Obama was being born or toddling around that I got my first, alarming introduction to the white man’s idea of Africa. As I remember it, I was sitting in my grandmother’s parlor, watching TV while she bustled about the kitchen. The images are fractured now: beating drums, a blood oath, white people sleeping in an isolated farmhouse and large, gleaming African men on a rampage with machetes, closing in, in high-contrast black and white; letters scrawled across the screen in a classic scare font, “Mau Mau!”

Maybe this was 1959, when British colonial forces in Kenya finally crushed the seven-year peasant revolt through a counter-insurgency campaign of murder, mutilation, torture, concentration camps and mass public hangings. Or maybe it was 1963, when the Africans of Kenya secured their independence. And

maybe a television programmer somewhere thought that the 1955 grind-house shockumentary *Mau-Mau*, narrated by a proper newsman, Chet Huntley, was good enough to excerpt in a proper news broadcast years later, or even to run as entertainment on a slow afternoon, censoring out the naked black women and half-naked white women on the edge of ravishment, the filmmakers' whole reason for calculating they could make money off such a flick in the first place.

These shards of memory came to mind when I saw the image of Obama as Witch Doctor, which Dr. David McKalip, a right-wing Florida neurosurgeon, forwarded to a listserv of tea-party zealots a few months ago. Liberal bloggers who had made a cottage industry out of caricaturing George W. Bush were predictably appalled, but the unknown graphic artist and McKalip did the country a perverse favor. More than all the words on the subject spilled so far, this lone image banishes the nonsense of postracial America and reminds us of the sturdy foundation blocks upon which racial America in the modern period has rested: white supremacy/anxiety, anticommunism and sex.

The image is a pastiche. Obama's head is grafted onto a picture of a man wearing nothing but bead necklaces and a loincloth, his legs spread wide, his long, thick fingers grasping a stick in front of him. There's a bone through his nose and a confection of feathers and flowers on his head. The picture evokes the world of *National Geographic* that once gave children a guiltless excuse to indulge their curiosity in the flesh. Under the witch doctor picture is the slogan "Obama Care," with the red, white and blue campaign symbol serving as the O and a sickle and hammer as the C.

The statement McKalip and his cohort were making is thus a political pastiche as well: Obama is foreign, strange, not "natural born"; half-naked, he is a figure of danger, seductive perhaps for his exoticism, his magic—the promise of cures—but ultimately loathsome, at once clownish, somehow thrilling to confront but also frightening, certainly not someone a white man would want to leave alone with his daughter... and a communist to boot.

It's demented, but not in the way commonly suggested when liberals laugh off the birthers, their fellow travelers in Congress and those now trying to breathe life into the rattling bones of anti-communism as "crazies." What seems to be a hodgepodge of interests is all of a piece, following a familiar logic, welded to sex; its mouthpieces merely had to come up with a diverting language.

Fifty years ago, white Southerners rallied on the steps of Little Rock High School, the ladies in their summer dresses, the men in shirt-sleeves and scowls. In one famous picture, some await their turn at a microphone while others bear placards that declare RACE MIXING IS COMMUNISM. Today no one is so crude as to decry "race mixing," which back in the day drew a straight line from sharing a blackboard to sharing a bed. Even Keith Bardwell, the Louisiana justice of the peace who recently refused to marry a black man and white woman, says he was thinking only of "the children." Perhaps he's seen the streets of Baton Rouge grow darker; the mothers pushing brown, black or mixed-race babies more numerous. Like him, the fringe ranters emphasize birth, nattering on about a constitutional crisis while nurturing the more fertile idea of a woman and man reproducing, unnaturally.

Right-wing radio hosts politely dismiss the birthers' conspiracy theories in the same way that they distanced themselves from Bardwell, but incessantly they deplore a regime of "political correctness" that, like the cabal of B-movie Africans swearing blood oaths in the night, has whites on the run. The radio, the direct-mail pieces, the calls at dinnertime from Newt Gingrich's operation are all on-message: the leader of this regime is by turns a fool and a tyrant, an antiwhite racist whose fealty is not to the USA but to government, debt, appeasement, socialism, communism. If he is not himself a terrorist, terror is what he inspires. No one need say he's out to sap white culture and rape white women; it's enough that he will enslave their children, the black man's revenge. How quaint it all seems that just a year ago some leftists were saying that Obama had dodged the expected racist volleys because his story is not a black story but an immigrant story. Somehow, in all the hoopla, they forgot about Africa.

American shlock-pop culture bulges with images of African menace and white vulnerability (or dangerous desire, as in *The Gorilla Woman*, with "Giant Monsters enthroned as love gods!" and a cheesecake heroine at ease in the hands of an ape), a trend that increased after World War II, as colonial empires crumbled, the cold war settled into a contest over the third world and, domestically, the black scare began to eclipse the red scare. Communists were associated with free love, desegregation and decolonization; civil rights leaders were called commie symps and had their beds bugged. The same elites who defended Jim Crow in the South—men such as Thomas Waring, a South Carolina newspaper editor who wrote, "Some basic truths stand out like the Ten Commandments. Southerners are not yet ready to accept an eleventh, 'Thou shalt not protect the purity of thy race'"—shaped right-wing policy toward white supremacist regimes in southern Africa. They supported Barry Goldwater in 1964 and split the Republicans against Gerald Ford in 1976 for shirking his duty as the leader of a superpower and a white power. In Ronald Reagan, who backed the rump state of Rhodesia and apartheid South Africa, they had their man.

In these Southerners' Rhodesian endeavor, from the 1960s to 1980, sexual anxiety, white rule and anti-communism "seemed to be part of a seamless garment," writes Gerald Horne in his excellent book *From the Barrel of a Gun: The United States and the War Against Zimbabwe, 1965–80*. Rhodesia had no communist or left parties, and liberationists initially were not driven by socialist ideology. To white colonialists and their American amen chorus, that was irrelevant, just as the paeans to racial purity were undisturbed by a historic indulgence in what Horne calls "sexual plunder." The white regime forcibly recruited colored women as prostitutes to service mercenaries who came by the hundreds from the United States to fight for white power and stanch the red tide. It recruited especially beautiful black women as spies. White claims to superiority hinged on imagining the African as a brute, which blew back in the form of white angst about sexual inferiority. A white Rhodesian researcher said she "'personally' recorded 'the dimensions of the penis of each dead guerrilla' she encountered." Ronald Hyam, a historian of African colonialism, pronounced, "One thing is certain. Sex is at the very heart of racism."

"Communism" was just a stand-in. It still is.

JOANN WYPIJEWSKI

Patricia J. Williams

Absolutely No Excuse

On November 9 the Supreme Court heard arguments in *Graham v. Florida* and *Sullivan v. Florida*, a pair of cases asking whether the Eighth Amendment's proscription against cruel and unusual punishment is violated by sentencing juveniles to life imprisonment with no possibility of parole. No other nation has sentenced juveniles to life. But in the United States there are approximately 2,500 lifers charged while under 18. Of those, 109 are children who committed offenses that did not involve murder and seventy-four were 14 or younger when they committed their crimes. And seventy-seven of those 109 were sentenced in Florida. And 84 percent of those are black.

One of the named plaintiffs is Joe Sullivan, who was 13 when he was convicted of sexual battery. Terrance Graham, the other named plaintiff, was convicted of robbery when he was 16. He was released on parole, and then given life for a parole violation when he was 17. Sullivan and Graham are imprisoned in Florida, where according to Bill McCollum, the state's attorney general, there has been a push to crack down hard on youth crime because, after a string of attacks on foreign tourists in the 1990s, the "problem was...threatening the state's bedrock tourism industry."

While the definition of "cruel and unusual" is the thrust of what the Court must decide, the racial and geographic makeup of this particular population of juvenile lifers is quite remarkable. Toss in the State of Florida's conflation of crime and commercial interest, and it adds up to a very large, very cruel and most unusual elephant in the room. But the legal debate has not and will not openly acknowledge race as a factor. Rather, the Court is deeply divided along ideologically colorblind lines, which nonetheless have philosophical underpinnings that allow such inequities to remain uninterrogated.

At the heart of any criminal case is the determination of a defendant's intentionality, which depends on some consideration of state of mind, or *mens rea*. There are two ways of expressing the query. On the one hand, we could ask if the act was intentional in a narrow sense: was the crime physically performed by the named defendant without radical chemical imbalances or physical coercion? This way of thinking places great emphasis on the act itself. On the other hand, we could frame the question in such a way that foregrounds the actor and his motives, an approach that requires more examination of the defendant and his thinking about consequences—that is, about meaning, relation, capacity.

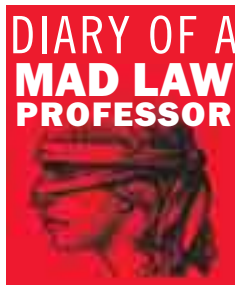
Most of us recognize that there is a difference between (a) meaning to put one's car into reverse; and (b) meaning to put the car into reverse while carelessly failing to check carefully behind it; and (c) meaning to put the car into reverse with the specific purpose of running over one's cheating spouse. Situations (b) and (c) more or less illustrate the difference between first-degree

murder and manslaughter. What the Eighth Amendment was crafted to patrol is punishment based on the bare schematic set out in situation (a)—where there is no possibility of mercy, no adjustment for intended outcome, no consideration of the state of mind of the actor, no tempering based on circumstance. Yet that, unfortunately, has been the direction toward which much of our law-and-order jurisprudence has been moving in recent years: not just trying juveniles as adults but also determinate sentencing in all categories. This is a move toward harsher and more fundamentalist outcomes. It relies on a philosophical equation, ancient as Parmenides, of morality as a pre-existing absolute. It is the reasoning behind such terminology as "the bad seed" or "born bad" or "beyond redemption."

But that is not the standard by which the Anglo-American justice system operates—at least not since the days when we burned witches. The thought of reducing all guilt or innocence, all probation or prison into a soulless system of automation has been thought of as unjust for at least two centuries. To convict or sentence or execute someone based on resolutely mechanistic determinants is the very definition of unconscionable. Indeed, a system based on the word of the law alone doesn't really need judges.

Juveniles have always presented a stronger case for mitigation because they are, well, juveniles. We make exceptions for them based on their immaturity, as both a biological and psychological presumption. We know that the prefrontal cortex, which governs executive function, does not fully develop until the early 20s. We know that juveniles are impulsive and are not sufficiently forward-thinking to calculate all the consequences of their behavior. As a legal matter, we take for granted that minors may not drink alcohol, get an unrestricted driver's license or make a binding contract.

But in an extremely mechanistic view of humans as innately good or evil, social circumstance—including age—means nothing. In the cases now before the Supreme Court, the Eighth Amendment challenge to that way of thinking must also involve conscious consideration of who it is we categorically value as "innately good," for their heinous acts will not define them ultimately, and who it is we are disposed to see as innately bad, for they will burn in hell. It is manifestly barbarous that children, who by definition are immature and unformed, should be tossed away for life, with no chance for rehabilitation or recognition of the possibility of change. And it is manifestly barbarous that there is such enormous disparity in the racial composition of these particular child defendants. It is barbarous that they are—particularly and glaringly in Florida—consistently and disproportionately deemed so incorrigible as to be throwaways, forever. In a civilized society, we must be able to see the difference between "making excuses" for deadly or criminal behavior and taking such factors as extreme youth into account as a mitigating factor for those who are still becoming legal agents. ■



Eric Alterman

The New Republic: Bad for the Jews

We all face phenomena in life that make us crazy. If Jews have a few more of these than most groups, then perhaps our history entitles us. The trick is to keep these neuroses under control, at least in public—a challenge made more difficult by the invention of the blogosphere.

One Jew who has clearly given up the fight is the longtime owner and self-appointed editor in chief of what was once liberalism's flagship weekly, *The New Republic*. Under Marty Peretz's lengthy tenure, *TNR* has lost much of its circulation, even more of its liberalism and every last bit of its weekliness. And while this long-term decline has many causes, much of it is due to the fact that Peretz's increasingly nasty neoconservatism, which was held in check in the past by strong editors like Michael Kinsley and Hendrik Hertzberg, has come to dominate the magazine's character as never before.

Peretz regularly employs *TNR*'s website to publish what are inarguably racist rants directed toward Arabs and other adherents of Islam. A recitation of just his greatest hits on this score might fill this entire magazine, but here's a representative example: "I actually believe that Arabs are feigning outrage when they protest what they call American (or Israeli) 'atrocities.' They are not shocked at all by what in truth must seem to them not atrocious at all. It is routine in their cultures. That comparison shouldn't comfort us as Americans. We have higher standards of civilization than they do." Lately, Peretz has added Latin America to his collection of inferior brown-skinned civilizations he could do without. Mexico, for instance, suffers from being a "Latin society with all of its characteristic deficiencies: congenital corruption, authoritarian government, anarchic politics, near-tropical work habits."

Admittedly, all this is not exactly news, but what has gone largely unremarked is how much of *TNR*'s ire has, of late, been directed at American Jews and in particular Jews who believe that the best way to protect Israel's long-term future would be to commit itself to finding a common ground for peace with the Palestinians.

Consider this: the young Jewish blogger and author Matthew Yglesias is widely recognized among liberals as one of the leading lights of his generation. And yet *The New Republic* has recently been forced to apologize to Yglesias twice for misrepresenting his views on Israel, and in both cases the topic at hand was his support for the new Jewish peace lobby J Street. (One of these apologies came from Peretz himself; the other from his widely recognized "Mini-me," James Kirchick, a former personal assistant promoted to the rank of *TNR* assistant editor.) An extremely reluctant apology was also forthcoming from Kirchick to another leading young liberal Jewish journalist, Ezra Klein, as well as to the not-so-young yours truly, following his repeated spewing of similarly malicious lies about our views on J Street. And yet de-

spite the obvious embarrassment to the magazine, its editors, contributors and friends these public humiliations undoubtedly cause, the invective and personal insults continue unabated. Younger Jews with whom Peretz disagrees are "pubescent" members of a "Juicebox mafia"; older ones are "aging...ideologue[s]" and participants in a "circle jerk."

The issues here extend beyond the disturbing decline of a once-great liberal magazine. *TNR* is also doing damage to the cause of Israel in a multiplicity of ways. Most obvious, it is helping to push Israel down a path where it will soon face only two options: to embrace a future of antidemocratic apartheid or sacrifice its Jewish character to preserve its democracy. Withdrawal from the West Bank is the only solution to this painful quandary, as all of Israel's true friends understand. And yet Marty Peretz even complains on the magazine's website when Obama and Hillary Clinton seek to prevent Israel's revanchist leaders Bibi Netanyahu and Avigdor Lieberman from exacerbating this problem by expanding Israel's illegal settlements on Palestinian land.

But presidents or prime ministers tend not to care what editors of little magazines think about anything; *TNR*'s more significant sin is its purposeful weakening of the bond between Israel and liberal American Jews—which is most of them—which derives from the constant stream of insults it spews at those who dare to disagree with Peretz's hawkish prejudices. (This barrage is occasionally directed at *TNR*'s own editors, like the estimable liberal intellectual John Judis, and former *TNR* editors, like the excellent investigative reporter Spencer Ackerman.) At J Street's recent convention, the organization's self-identification as "pro-Israel" generated considerable controversy and was reported to have been rejected by its university affiliate. J Street later corrected these early false reports, but they nevertheless inspired much merriment among bloggers from *TNR*, *Commentary* and *The Weekly Standard*, and others who sought to discredit the group with American Jews. To be honest, this Jew was more than a little disturbed himself. But then I considered it from the perspective of J Street's young supporters. They live in a media world in which to be considered "pro-Israel" is to appear to ally oneself with the likes of Peretz, Norman Podhoretz, Abe Foxman and AIPAC. Perhaps that alone is enough to alienate any number of idealistic young Jews, even those who "love Zion" as much as Marty Peretz...

Personally, I would prefer that J Street redouble its efforts to reclaim "pro-Israel" from the Jewish jingoists, as the group represents a potentially crucial counterweight to the neocon-dominated world of American Jewish institutional politics, whatever the price to its membership. In the meantime, perhaps anyone who considers him- or herself to be a genuine friend of Marty Peretz or his magazine might suggest that he consider a long, restful vacation. It would be good for *The New Republic*, good for American liberalism and, believe me, good for the Jews. ■



REGREENING AFRICA



PETER O. ZIERLEIN

In the dry Sahel, farmers are already adapting to climate change.

by MARK HERTSGAARD

The sun is setting on another scorching hot day in the western African nation of Burkina Faso. But here on the farm of Yacouba Sawadogo, the air is noticeably cooler. A hatchet slung over his shoulder, the gray-bearded farmer strides through his woods and fields with the easy grace of a much younger man. “Climate change is a subject I feel I have something to say about,” he says in his tribal language, Moré, which he delivers in a deep, unhurried rumble. Though he cannot read or write, Sawadogo is a pioneer of a tree-based approach to farming that has transformed the western Sahel in recent years, while providing one of the most hopeful examples on earth of how even very poor people can adapt to the ravages of climate change.

Wearing a brown cotton robe and white skullcap, Sawadogo sits beneath acacia and zizyphus trees that shade a pen holding about twenty guinea fowl. Two cows doze at his feet; bleats of goats float through the still evening air. His farm is large by local standards—fifty acres—and much of it has been in his family for generations. The rest of his family abandoned it after the terrible drought of 1972–84, when a 20 percent decline in average annual rainfall slashed food production throughout the Sahel, turned vast stretches of savanna into desert and caused

hundreds of thousands of deaths from hunger.

For Sawadogo, leaving the farm was unthinkable. “My father is buried here,” he says simply. In his mind, the droughts of the 1980s marked the beginning of climate change, a term most people here do not recognize. Sawadogo, however, says he has been adapting to a hotter, drier climate for the past twenty years.

“In the drought years, people found themselves in such a terrible situation they had to think in new ways,” says Sawadogo, who prides himself on being an innovator. In this case, he revived a technique local farmers had used for centuries, but he adapted it to the new climate conditions he faced. It had long been the practice among Sahelian farmers to dig *zai*—shallow pits—that concentrate scarce rainfall onto the roots of crops. Sawadogo increased the size of his *zai* to capture more rainfall. But his most important innovation, he says, was to add manure to the *zai* during the dry season, a practice his peers derided as wasteful.

Sawadogo’s experiments worked: by concentrating water and fertility in pits, he increased crop yields. But the most significant result was one he hadn’t anticipated: tiny trees began to sprout amid his rows of millet and sorghum, thanks

to seeds contained in the manure. As one growing season followed another, it became apparent that the trees—now a few feet high—were further increasing crop yields while also restoring soil fertility. “Since I began this technique of rehabilitating degraded land, my family has enjoyed food security in good years and bad,” Sawadogo says.

Sawadogo’s struggle may seem small, but it is part of the most important test humanity now faces. No matter what happens at Copenhagen or beyond, the world is locked in to decades of temperature rise and the associated climate impacts: deeper droughts, fiercer floods, more pests. How populations in the global South adapt to these changes will help decide whether millions of people live or die.

The tree-based farming that Sawadogo and hundreds of thousands of other poor farmers in the Sahel have adopted could help millions of their counterparts around the world cope with climate change. Already these practices have spread across vast portions of Burkina Faso and neighboring Niger and Mali, turning millions of acres of what had become semi-desert in the 1980s into more productive land. The transformation is so pervasive that the new greenery is visible from outer space via satellite pictures. With climate change, much more of the planet’s land will be hot and arid like the Sahel. It only makes sense, then, to learn from the quiet green miracle unfolding there.

This is probably the largest positive environmental transformation in the Sahel and perhaps in all of Africa,” says Chris Reij, a Dutch geographer who has worked in the region for thirty years. Technically, these methods are known as “agro-forestry” or “farmer managed natural regeneration” (FMNR). Scientific studies confirm what Sawadogo already knows: mixing trees and food crops brings a range of significant benefits. The trees shade crops from overwhelming heat, act as wind-breaks that protect young crops and help the soil retain moisture. When their leaves fall to the ground, they act as mulch, boosting soil fertility and providing fodder for livestock. In emergencies, people can even eat the leaves to avoid starvation. “In the past, farmers sometimes had to sow their fields four or five times because winds would blow the seeds away,” says Reij, who advocates for FMNR with the zeal of a missionary. “With trees to buffer the wind and anchor the soil, farmers need sow only once.”

Equally important, the *zai* and other water-harvesting techniques have helped recharge underground water tables. “In the 1980s water tables were falling by an average of one meter a year,” Reij says. “Since FMNR and the water-harvesting techniques began to take hold, water tables have risen by five meters, despite a growing population.” In some areas, the water table has risen by as much as seventeen meters. Some analysts have

credited increased rainfall beginning in 1994. Reij says that can’t explain it: “The water tables began rising well before that. The effect is felt within one or two years’ time.” Studies have documented the same replenishing effects in Niger.

Over time, Sawadogo grew more and more enamored of trees; now his land looks less like a farm than a forest, albeit one made up of trees that, to my California eyes, often seem rather thin. “In the beginning I mixed trees and crops,” he says. “But later I came to prefer trees, because they provide other benefits.” Trees can be harvested—their branches pruned and sold—and then they grow back, and their benefits for the soil make it easier for additional trees to grow. “The more trees you have, the more you get,” Sawadogo explains.

Wood is still the main source of energy in rural Africa, and as tree cover expanded on his land, Sawadogo was in a position to sell wood for cooking, furniture-making and construction, thus increasing and diversifying his income—a key tactic for adapting to climate change. Trees are also a source of natural medicines, no small advantage in an area where modern health-care is scarce and expensive. And of course, trees keep people and livestock cooler than they otherwise would be in the brutal heat of the Sahel.

“I think trees are at least a partial answer to climate change, and I’ve tried to share this information with others,” Sawadogo adds. “I’ve used my motorbike to visit about a hundred villages, and others have come to visit me and learn. I must say, I’m very proud these ideas are spreading.”

To be clear, these farmers are not planting trees, as Nobel Prize-winning activist Wangari Maathai has promoted in Kenya with her Greenbelt Movement. They are simply growing and nurturing the ones that sprout naturally. Planting trees is much too expensive and risky for really poor farmers. Studies in the western Sahel have found that about 80 percent of planted trees die within a year or two. By contrast, trees that sprout naturally are native species and thus more resilient. And of course they cost nothing.

In Mali, too, I saw trees growing amid cropland seemingly everywhere. For example, in the grindingly poor village of Sokoura, the houses are made of sticks covered in mud; there is no electricity or running water; children wear dirty, torn clothes; and many of them have distended bellies from malnutrition. Yet to hear locals tell it, life is improving, in large part thanks to trees.

It’s a five-minute walk from the village to the land of Oumar Guindo. Missing a front tooth and wearing a black smock over green slacks, Guindo says he owns fifteen acres, where he cultivates millet and sorghum. Ten years ago he began taking advice from Sahel Eco, a Malian-British NGO that promotes agro-forestry. Now Guindo’s land is dotted with trees, one every five meters or so. Most are young, with such spindly branches that they resemble bushes, but there are also a few specimens with trunks the diameter of fire hydrants.

We sit beneath a large tree known as the “Apple of the Sahel,” whose twigs sport inchlong thorns. The soil is sandy in color and consistency—not a farmer’s ideal—but water



Mark Hertsgaard (markhertsgaard.com), a fellow of The Open Society Institute, is The Nation's environment correspondent. He has covered climate change for twenty years and is the author of six books, including the forthcoming Generation Hot: Living Through the Storm of Climate Change.

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availability and crop yields have increased substantially since Guindo began nurturing trees among his crops. “Before, this field couldn’t fill even one granary,” he says. “Now it can fill one granary and half of another”—roughly a 50 percent increase in production.

Back in the village we examine the oblong granaries, which like the houses are constructed by slathering mud over stick frames. Their sides are six feet wide and fifteen feet tall. A notched tree trunk serves as a ladder to an opening near the top. All contain good amounts of millet: food security until the next harvest or even beyond.

“Twenty years ago, after the drought, our situation here

Tree-based farming has brought a quiet green miracle to the Sahel, turning millions of acres of semi-desert into more productive land.

was quite desperate, but now we live much better,” explains one of the farmers. “Before, most families had only one granary each. Now they have three or four, though their land has not increased. We have more livestock as well.” He adds that all the farmers in this area are cultivating trees now.

The agro-forestry that is greening the Sahel is not only the product of farmer-to-farmer information-sharing and small-scale NGO assistance. Changes in government policy have also been very important.

In Mali, tree management had been part of traditional agriculture. Salif Guindo (no relation to Oumar), a farmer from the village of Endé, explains how they revived an ancient voluntary association of farmers, called Barahogon, that had encouraged tree stewardship for generations. But using trees was abandoned when cutting wood became a crime. First the French colonial government declared all trees to be state property, enabling government officials to sell timber rights to woodcutters. Similar arrangements continued after independence. Meanwhile, farmers caught pruning or cutting trees were punished. As a result they would uproot seedlings to avoid later hassles. Needless to say, several generations of this left the land denuded and increasingly desiccated.

In the early 1990s, a new Mali government—perhaps mindful that farmers furious about mistreatment had killed Forestry Agency officials in some villages—passed a law giving farmers ownership of trees on their land. Farmers did not hear about the law until Sahel Eco mounted a campaign to inform them via radio and word of mouth. Since then, FMNR has spread rapidly, including across borders. Salif recalls a recent visit from twenty mayors and provincial directors of agricultural and environmental agencies from Burkina Faso. “They seemed astonished to hear our story and see the evidence,” Salif says. “They asked, Is this really possible?”

In Niger, too, FMNR had a hard time gaining traction, in part because it involves some counterintuitive elements: name-

ly, to grow trees farmers must be allowed to cut them down as well. Tony Rinaudo, an Australian agronomist and missionary and one of the original champions of FMNR, explains that only after Niger government officials suspended enforcement of regulations against cutting trees did tree-growing gather momentum. “Once farmers felt they owned the trees in their fields, FMNR took off,” he says. “They stopped seeing trees as weeds and started seeing them as assets.”

The pattern has been the same throughout the western Sahel: FMNR has spread largely by itself, from farmer to farmer and village to village, as people see the results with their own eyes and move to adopt the practice. Thanks to agro-forestry, satellite photos analyzed by the US Geological Survey can now discern the border between Niger and Nigeria. On the Niger side, where farmers are allowed to own trees and FMNR is commonplace, there is abundant tree cover; on the Nigeria side, where big tree-planting schemes have failed dramatically, the land is almost barren.

When these images became available in 2008, even FMNR advocates like Reij and Rinaudo were shocked: they had no idea so many farmers had grown so many trees. Combining the satellite evidence with ground surveys and anecdotal evidence, Reij estimates that in Niger alone farmers have grown 200 million trees and rehabilitated 12.5 million acres of degraded land.

What makes FMNR so empowering, and sustainable, is that Africans themselves own the technology, which is simply the knowledge that growing trees amid crops brings many benefits. What’s more, this knowledge is free. It’s hard to overstate how important that is to poor farmers—and nations. It means they can use the technology now, without waiting or relying on capital infusions from foreign governments or humanitarian organizations.

This makes FMNR very different, says Reij, from the Millennium Villages model of development promoted by Jeffrey Sachs, the high-profile director of Columbia University’s Earth Institute. Millennium Villages provides villages, free of charge, with what are considered the building blocks of development: modern seeds and fertilizer, boreholes for clean water, clinics.

“It’s beautiful, their vision of ending hunger in Africa,” says Reij. “The problem is, it doesn’t work. Millennium Villages require a heavy investment per village, as well as a flow of external support for some years, and that is not a sustainable solution. It’s hard to believe the outside world will provide the billions of dollars necessary to create tens of thousands of Millennium Villages in Africa.” Indeed, foreign aid flows collapsed after the financial crash of 2008.

Outsiders do have a role, however. They can encourage the necessary policy changes by national governments, such as granting farmers legal ownership of trees. And they can fund, at very low cost, the grassroots information-sharing that has spread FMNR so effectively in western Sahel. Although farmers have done the most to alert their peers to FMNR’s bene-



fits, they have received crucial assistance from a handful of activists and NGOs such as Rinaudo, Reij and Sahel Eco. These advocates hope to spread FMNR to other African countries through what is called “African Re-Greening Initiatives,” says Reij, who has briefed the president of Ethiopia on the idea. The point is that tree-based crop systems are a win-win: they help farmers adapt to climate change even as they boost food security and reduce rural poverty.

Above all, the world must act in Copenhagen and beyond to reverse the global warming that is making the Sahel such an inhospitable place. Every form of adaptation has limits; if the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is not reduced,

increasing temperatures will eventually overwhelm even the most ingenious coping mechanisms. Trees help on this front as well: as they grow, they remove carbon dioxide from the air through photosynthesis. Thus the Copenhagen talks must include a strong commitment to protecting and expanding forests under the REDD program (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries, a UN program).

Meanwhile, Sawadogo is putting his faith in trees. “My conviction, based on personal experience, is that trees are like lungs,” he says. “If we do not protect them, and increase their numbers, it will be the end of the world.” ■

An Inconvenient Solution

In *Our Choice*, Al Gore explains what must be done. But is there the political will to do it?

by BILL MCKIBBEN

Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth* was one of the high points not only of the environmental movement but also of the documentary tradition in America. He figured out how to use a new medium, PowerPoint, to take the unavoidably wonkish story of global warming and make it scary, credible and manageable. It was, perhaps, as important as anything he could have done as president, and he deserved not only the Oscar but also the Nobel.

As almost everyone noted at the time, however, there was one problem with the film: the section on what to actually do about the biggest problem we’ve ever faced was remarkably short, both in duration and on plausible ideas. If the world is coming to an end, changing your light bulb doesn’t seem like the obvious response. Or rather, it seems highly obvious but highly insufficient—a gesture, not a solution.

Gore heard those criticisms and spent the next few years convening a series of more than thirty “Solutions Summits” in Nashville and elsewhere, where he picked the brains of virtually everyone who ever thought professionally about climate and energy. He’s taken all those data and all those ideas, and with the help of a capable team of researchers he’s turned them into a book, *Our Choice*, an ambitious and entirely successful attempt to lay out all that we know about mainstream answers to global warming. (When I say “virtually everyone,” I mean it; the acknowledgments take up four pages of agate type and include even me.) He’s got chapters on solar electricity, on wind energy, on biofuels, on nuclear power and even on



KAREN CALDI/COIT

more recondite topics: geothermal energy, carbon sequestration.

Occasionally, truth be told, the book verges on the nerdy. There are diagrams on topics like “how a turbine works” that could have come from an old-fashioned encyclopedia. Gore has a weakness for statistics: did you know that between 1984 and 1991 nine early concentrated solar thermal power plants were built in the Mojave Desert with a total of 2 million square meters of mirrors? Some of the vast book is taken up with what amounts to more PowerPoint slides—beautiful but

stock images of farmers or roaring hurricanes. (If you like gorgeous windmill porn, this is your book.)

Taken as a whole, however, this is the most comprehensive and well-informed survey anyone has ever done of what we need to do to get off fossil fuel. Gore is judicious and reasoned at every turn, and gets most of the calls exactly right. Building more traditional nuclear power plants will be too expensive to provide much help. Ditto carbon sequestration: it’s a good idea to try and take the exhaust from coal-fired power plants and store it underground in old oil wells, but the costs so far seem prohibitive. In fact, to many of these dilemmas Gore applies a wise test: “Put a high price on carbon. When the reality of the need to sharply reduce CO₂ emissions is integrated into all market calculations—including the decisions by utilities and their investors—market forces will drive us quickly toward the answers we need.”

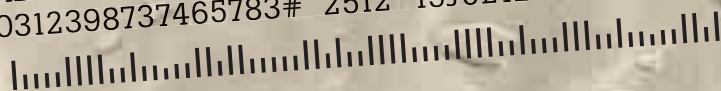
Gore, I think, has reasonably answered not only the one apt criticism of *An Inconvenient Truth* but also the good-faith (as opposed to talk-radio) objections of anyone wondering if the world really could exist without fossil fuels. The answer is, not easily, but it’s well within the realm of technical possibility. If we followed his advice, we’d make it. What’s lacking, of course, is the political will to really do it.

Bill McKibben is the author, most recently, of The Bill McKibben Reader. A scholar in residence at Middlebury College, he is co-founder of 350.org, the largest global grassroots organizing campaign on climate change.

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And if there's one weakness this time around, it's that Gore could have devoted a little space to figuring out how we should build that political will. If we're going to impose a price on carbon at the Copenhagen conference, or pass a strong renewables target in Congress, or do any of the dozen or so other things the situation desperately demands, reasoned argument among experts alone will not carry the day. In fact, it won't come close. We've known, more or less, what to do for more than a decade, but any progress has been stymied, especially in this country, by the well-funded deniers propped up by the coal and oil industries, and by the pliant and gullible media that continue to give them play. Simply adding a few thousand more tons of scientific reports to the environmental side of the scale won't tip the debate, not when Exxon can afford to buy the necessary coterie of Congress members. The only thing that will suffice is to build a movement strong enough in some other currency (bodies in the street, votes in the ballot box) to provide serious counterpressure.

Of course, it is not Gore's job to provide this pressure (and, in any event, his Alliance for Climate Protection has been a useful attempt to build some). The guy's not responsible for coming up with absolutely every answer to every part of this problem—and the good news, in the past few months, is that many others are stepping into this realm. I've been watching climate policy closely for twenty years, and only now does the planet's immune system seem to be kicking in: civil society has finally recognized global warming for the overarching threat it is, and has begun to go to work.

The parts I've gotten to watch most closely have been the international efforts. In the past eighteen months, my fellow activists and I have built 350.org, the first real global grassroots climate change campaign, which peaked on October 24 with a global day of action. That day featured thousands upon thousands of events in more than 150 countries—it may have been the most geographically widespread day of political action the planet has ever seen. (And it was almost certainly the only one devoted to a point of scientific fact: 350 parts per million carbon dioxide is what scientists now tell us is the most the earth's atmosphere can safely hold, at least if we want a planet “similar to that on which civilization developed and to which life on earth is adapted.”) It was, truth be told, quite amazing fun to watch the campaign come together—young people around the world, clergy, scientists all dreaming up powerful ways to take those three digits, arguably the most important number in the world, and make them the most well-known.

There were underwater cabinet meetings (in the Maldives, led by President Mohamed Nasheed, whose nation may not exist in a hundred years) and climbers on the melting slopes of the world's highest peaks. There were thousands of churches ringing their bells 350 times and giant actions in major cities where people formed 3s and 5s and 0s with their bodies, a kind of planet-scale Scrabble. It began in New Zealand and went around the world till sunset in Hawaii—and

since it was tied not to a slogan but to a specific demand, it may help move the Copenhagen talks at least a little in the direction of the science. But this kind of movement will need to continue and grow. We'll need civil disobedience, of the kind that blockaded Congress's coal-fired power plant last spring; we'll need symbolic witness, like 350.org; we'll need old-fashioned lobbying.

We also learned a lot of lessons about organizing globally, something that wasn't really possible even a few years ago. The power of the Internet is less in the gee-whiz stuff Gore describes (real-time pictures of the earth so that everyone can see its fragile beauty) but in the ability to use it, à la the Obama campaign in 2008, as a tool to enable events in the real world. At 350.org we're running a website with fourteen languages and using wordless animated videos; our sense is that it's possible for the idea of a “global movement” to be something more than pious rhetoric. On this toughest of all issues we were able to find millions of people on both sides of the rich-poor divide who

If we're going to accomplish the dozens of things the situation demands, reasoned argument among experts will not carry the day.

understood that they have a great deal in common, beginning with the shared awareness that nowhere on the planet is safe once we're north of 350 ppm. It's moving—humbling, really—when someone sends you pictures from their rally in Cameroon or Burundi or Quito or Phnom Penh. Humbling because you know they did nothing to cause the problem but have come to realize that in a world newly wired together, they might be able to play some real role in solving it.

Gore ends his book with a lovely speech from the future, looking back on what was accomplished after “the turning point came in 2009” with “the inauguration of a new president in the United States.” Former opponents, impressed with the president's sincerity and moved by the questions of their children, began to link arms in the struggle for a clean-energy future, and soon the right incentives were unleashed, new technology began to pour off the line, even passenger rail surged again across the land. “Although leadership came from many countries, once the United States finally awakened to its responsibilities, it re-established the moral authority the world had come to expect from the U.S. during the 40 years after World War II.”

That's a very pleasant dream, especially for someone like Gore, who was a firsthand witness to the period of American leadership he describes. But as he knows as well as anyone, at the moment it's nothing more than a dream. Making it real will depend on how hard we push the system. There's no question it's capable of responding, and no question that left to its own devices it won't. ■



The Global South Bloc

Poor countries can make big gains at climate talks if they stick together, argues Saleemul Huq.

by MARK HERTSGAARD

Saleemul Huq has done more to help poor people and countries prepare for climate change than perhaps anyone else in the world. As a co-founder of the Bangladesh Center for Advanced Studies in the mid-1980s, he directed some of the first studies of how climate change would affect the poor. In 2001 he joined the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) in London. There he worked to raise awareness among European governments, media and NGOs about the great injustice of climate change: it has been caused by centuries of greenhouse gas emissions by rich industrial countries, but its impacts—stronger storms, deeper droughts, fiercer floods, sea level rise—punish the poor first and worst.

The poor deserve help coping, argues Huq. Toward that end, he has helped expand the NGO climate coalition beyond the usual environmental suspects to include leading antipoverty and humanitarian organizations. The landmark 2004 report “Up in Smoke?”—co-sponsored by Greenpeace, World Wildlife Fund, Oxfam and others—pointed out that climate change threatens to deepen poverty, violate human rights and create many more disaster victims. Thus industrial countries must not only reduce their emissions to limit future damage (mitigation, in climate parlance); they must also help poor nations cope with the impacts that are now unavoidable (adaptation). Huq’s other priority has been to help poor-country governments engage more effectively in the UN-sponsored negotiations that will decide international climate policy.

Copenhagen will be the biggest test yet for Huq and his colleagues as they fight for genuine and equitable solutions to climate change. Huq recently told me what to watch for at the talks—and how you can help.

Mark Hertsgaard: You’ve said it’s not so bad if Congress fails to pass the Waxman-Markey climate bill before Copenhagen. Why not?

Saleemul Huq: Waxman-Markey is not a strong bill. If the Senate passes it, that actually ties Obama’s hands in Copenhagen, because then the US can say, “We can’t do more than this.” But if, at Copenhagen, we can get everyone else to up their ante, then Obama can go back to Congress and say, “Hey, guys, we need to do a much more ambitious package than we thought.”

We need to find a way for everyone to ratchet up their level of ambition. The European Union has said it will do a 20 percent cut of emissions [from 1990 levels] by 2020, but it would increase that to 30 percent if others do it as well. Same with Japan: the new government has pledged 25 percent cuts, if



PETER O. ZIERLEIN

others do it. “If others do it” is the motto now: we need a race to the top. That’s the trick that needs to be pulled off between now and December.

MH: What are the priorities for poor countries at Copenhagen?

SH: Obtaining a lot more money for adaptation to climate change is their primary goal. The latest studies suggest that adaptation will need tens of billions of dollars annually, not the smaller amounts discussed in the past. In addition, poor countries have a goal they have not had before, on mitigation targets: what do

big industrial countries have to do to cut emissions, but also what do big developing countries have to do? The less developed countries have to stand up to the Chinas, Indias and Brazils, which they’re not used to doing and not comfortable with.

The less developed countries have, however, formed a common position. They’ve called on the world to agree to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius [above preindustrial levels].

MH: 1.5C? That’s a pretty tough target. The leaders of the G-8 rich industrial economies endorsed 2C in July, and many scientists say even that will be very difficult.

SH: [The 1.5C target] is almost unachievable, but at least it’s ambitious. These developing countries are saying, “Even 1.5C is going to cause us harm, and we’re not the ones who caused this.” A 1.5C target asks the rest of the world to go into wartime mobilization against climate change rather than taking a laissez-faire approach. But this target has gotten no attention in the press so far.

MH: How did developing countries get to where they can advance a common position on climate change?

SH: Since 2001 we at IIED have focused on the Least Developed Countries group. This group includes forty-nine countries, mainly from Africa but also Asia and Haiti, whose per capita income can be a dollar a day or less. This group had been participating in negotiations on climate change but was not engaged in any meaningful sense. We tried to strengthen the negotiators of these countries, helping their diplomats understand the issues better, develop shared positions and negotiate as a group rather than individually.

One problem these governments had was, lack of money meant that they sent just one negotiator per country to a negotiating session. But these negotiations are highly complex, and the sessions often split into six to eight streams of subnegotiations, which makes it impossible for a single diplomat to cover everything. But with forty-eight countries, if they work together, they have a big group and can be more effective.

Now, before each COP [Conference of the Parties, climate

lingo for sessions like the one in Copenhagen], we hold workshops for negotiators from the forty-eight Least Developed Countries. We go through the agenda, strategize what their positions can be, and they organize themselves into groups that can handle different streams of the negotiations.

MH: Poor countries scored a victory at the Bali negotiations two years ago, didn't they?

SH: The Kyoto Protocol, agreed on in 1997, created a Clean Development Mechanism to finance low-carbon development in poor countries. Under the CDM, every time a rich country paid to build, say, a low-carbon power plant in a poor country, 2 percent of the total investment was set aside to fund adaptation efforts in poor countries. Over time, these 2 percent deposits accumulated. But these funds had not been monetized, because there was disagreement over who should manage the fund. Rich countries wanted the Global Environment Facility of the World Bank to run it. Developing countries wanted a new fund, with the governance shared but with a slight majority of representatives from developing countries. At Bali, the developing countries won that argument—by sticking together and making the better argument.

MH: You talk as if the best argument always wins in international negotiations.

SH: [*laughs*] No, of course that doesn't always happen. But it can, under the right circumstances. The Least Developed Countries group is a subset of the Group of 77 developing countries plus China. [The group actually includes 130 countries but for historical reasons is still called G-77 plus China.] So first the LDC group had to convince the other governments in the G-77 plus China that their idea was best, and then they had to get the rich countries to come along. The realpolitik of this is that once the LDC 48 and the Group of 77 plus China have a common position, it's a very powerful bloc. They don't often have a common position, but when they do, they carry a lot of weight in the negotiations, and the developed countries respect that.

MH: That suggests that if the LDC 48 and the G-77 plus China are united, they could achieve something at Copenhagen.

SH: That's precisely the idea.

MH: What can Americans do to help?

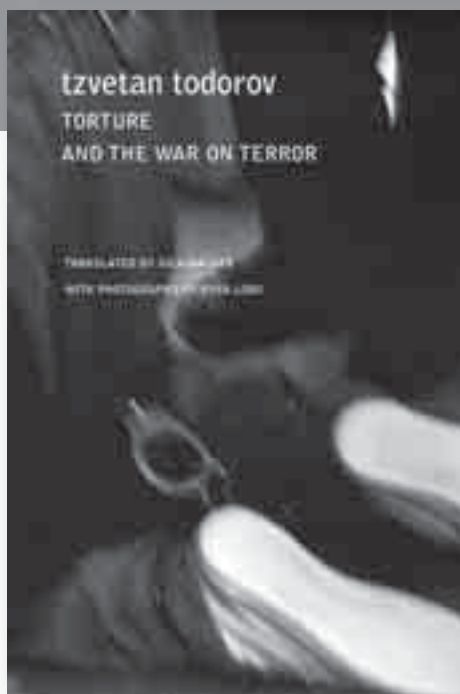
SH: The United States is an unusual case. The rest of world has accepted that climate change is a major problem, it has to be dealt with and we all have to pitch in together. The new prime minister of Japan has made a radically more ambitious proposal, promising 25 percent emissions reductions by 2020. That is now the global position, except for the US. We have an administration in Washington that gets it. The problem in the US is the public and the Congress. Obviously President Obama has only so much political capital, and he's spending it on the healthcare bill. He needs to spend more, though, on getting a climate bill.

The US public is the only rich-country public that maintains a high level of skepticism about climate change. This skepticism is fed by a sophisticated and expensive misinformation program funded by the oil and coal industries. So Americans need to be made aware of what the situation really is. Average Americans need to get better informed. Then they need to tell their leaders they want them to take action. ■

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The UK's Climate Rebels

Some of the best activism is occurring here—but in policy terms, the payoff has been slight.

by MARIA MARGARONIS

London

In a worn leather armchair on London's bare Blackheath, a middle-aged man is reading Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, in which a father and son trudge through a lifeless postapocalyptic world. Around him spreads a city of colorful pop-up tents, kitchens under canvas, composting toilets and a solar-powered cinema. The bright pink banner over the entrance reads, CAPITALISM IS CRISIS.

Welcome to the 2009 Camp for Climate Action, a weeklong, late-summer strategy session, teach-in and experiment in sustainable living by Britain's direct-action movement against climate change. The offspring of a liaison between anticapitalist protesters and environmental activists, Climate Camp was born in a field outside the G-8 summit in Scotland in 2005—the one where former Prime Minister Tony Blair vowed to make climate change a priority, helping to push the issue up the media agenda. Since then campers have invaded coal-fired power stations, protested the planned third runway at London's Heathrow Airport ("We are armed...only with peer-reviewed science") and pitched their tents in the heart of the City of London to highlight the connections between profit and carbon abuse. With other groups from the growing movement for climate justice—from urban activists to indigenous campaigners—the camp will have a loud presence in Copenhagen in December, aiming to turn the conference for a day into a People's Summit.

Previous gatherings have been plagued by overzealous policing, which hijacked headlines and detracted from the camp's main messages—no new coal, no new runways, an end to endless growth—but at the Blackheath camp the police have been on their best behavior. Blackheath is still common land, where any local is in theory free to graze his sheep. Wat Tyler's Peasant Revolt assembled here in 1381 to march against the government, as did the Kent rebellion in 1450 and suffragettes in the early twentieth century. The campers see themselves as heirs to those traditions, and in a sense they are. If you are young (or not so young), idealistic and radical in Britain now, this is where you go for community, engagement and direct-action training.

In the last week of August as many as 3,000 people visited Blackheath, to camp, to attend a workshop or just to try a smoothie made in a bicycle-powered blender. The atmosphere was somewhere between a conference and a festival. In the milky light of the main marquee, geeky young men in



RYAN INZANA

glasses, girls in recycled frocks and seasoned old campaigners discussed climate science and carbon trading, composting and convergence with visitors from think tanks and environmental NGOs. A vigorous daily role-playing game taught would-be protesters how to deal with police tactics. Hours were spent debating the movement's future. How to reach out to "workers," older people, ethnic minorities? "Edgy" and radical, or "fluffy" and more accessible? Anticapitalist or merely antigrowth?

Climate Camp has been criticized for being too inward-looking, and all this navel-gazing has its self-indulgent aspect. But then, movements like this one—mostly young and white and middle class—have always been about transforming their participants as well as the wider world. Climate Camp has no (official) leaders; decisions are made by consensus using a code of hand signals, which can take some time. And while some punters may just be along for the ride, a growing number see civil disobedience as the only sane response to a desperate situation and are willing to risk arrest and serious injury.

The camp is the largest node in a network of direct-action groups that have sprung up in Britain over the past five years; their tactics range from the physically courageous to the whimsically theatrical. Protesters have scaled power-station towers, stopped coal trains and super-glued themselves to corporate headquarters. Members of Plane Stupid shut down airports by climbing on top of short-haul jets or chaining themselves to the wheels. This summer Climate Rush, in suffragette petticoats, caught the tabloids' attention by dumping manure on the driveway of Jeremy Clarkson, the BBC's motor-mouthed car promoter. A "Climate Casino" held in full evening dress outside the European Climate Exchange dramatized one of the Blackheath camp's key arguments: that market-based solutions like carbon trading will not deliver the necessary emission reductions and risks producing a new financial bubble. The performance inspired a Channel 4 TV news investigation that confirmed the protesters' case: large profits are made through carbon trading, but almost no carbon is saved.

The direct-action movement keeps climate change in the news, draws attention to key battlegrounds, expands the space for dissent, brings urgency and flair to an issue that can seem distant or numbingly technical. It can also claim a couple of concrete victories, though the recession has had as much to do with both. In October the German power company E.ON shelved its plans to expand the Kingsnorth coal-fired power station in Kent—site of a previous camp—after failing to win an EU grant for a carbon capture and storage project, which

Maria Margaronis, a Nation contributing editor, writes from The Nation's London bureau.

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went instead to an existing plant in Yorkshire. The planning application for Heathrow's third runway has also been put on ice until after the next election; the Conservatives, who are almost certain to win, have said they will scrap the development. The runway has attracted widespread opposition, not least from local residents and from the government's advisory body, the Committee on Climate Change. Greenpeace (the original environmental direct-action group) has bought a plot of land in the runway's path with the help of three celebrities; more than 57,000 people have joined "Airplot" as nominal legal owners, theoretically too many to evict or take to court.



In most ways Britain is well ahead of the United States on climate change, though that's not saying much. Out-and-out climate science deniers are almost as rare as creationists. Being green carries a market premium and a certain cachet; knowing where your asparagus comes from is an accepted part of affluent consumer consciousness. Most of the culture talks the talk; the elegantly simple 10:10 Campaign, recently launched by Franny Armstrong, director of *The Age*

It's obvious that on climate change, the government's right hand doesn't know, or want to know, what the left hand is doing.

of *Stupid*, and supported by the *Guardian* newspaper, has persuaded more than 40,000 people and nearly 2,000 businesses (including E.ON—a little greenwash here) as well as the leaders of the three major parties to pledge to reduce their emissions by 10 percent in the year 2010. Britain has a venerable rural conservation movement, supported by the same people who marched against Labour's fox-hunting ban and by Prince Charles, that well-known organic farmer. Jumping onto the green bandwagon was no big leap for David Cameron when he rebranded the Tory Party in 2006, replacing its blue torch logo with a green scribbled tree.

Since then politicians of all stripes have vied for the green high ground. In 2008 the Climate Change Act made Britain the first country to commit to a legally binding cut in greenhouse gas emissions, 80 percent against 1990 levels by 2050. This summer Ed Miliband, Labour's tireless secretary for energy and climate change, published a sweeping and detailed "Low Carbon Transition Plan," which laid out how the first stage of that cut would be achieved and promised 400,000 new sustainable jobs by 2015, firmly tying economic recovery to energy reform.

And yet, on most objective measures and despite recent improvements, Britain remains one of Europe's worst offenders on greenhouse gas emissions. In 2007, according to EU statistics, the renewable share of Britain's energy consumption was the lowest percentage of all the EU countries (Malta's figure is not listed). Its total emissions and emissions from energy production were exceeded only by Germany's; those from waste

were the highest in the EU. What has kept the government from putting its money where its mouth is—and what does the movement need to do to bring about real change?

The story of the Vestas factory may hold a few clues. Last July, a few days after Miliband launched his transition plan, the Danish company Vestas announced it was closing its wind turbine factory on the Isle of Wight—the only such plant in Britain—with the loss of some 600 jobs. There was an instant uproar, with calls for the government to bail out Vestas as it had the banks; the dispute became a major embarrassment for Miliband. A handful of cadres from Workers' Climate Action—an offshoot of Climate Camp formed by members of a Trotskyist group called Workers' Liberty—had been talking to Vestas employees since the closure was first rumored, laying the groundwork for a factory occupation. When the time came, some thirty workers locked themselves in the building, supported from the outside by local residents and assorted climate campaigners, who brought their tents and their energy and tossed in food-stuffed tennis balls to help sustain morale. The occupation lasted nineteen days and got plenty of press attention, but the factory still closed.

The Vestas plant manufactured turbines for the American market (a smaller size than those used here onshore); it made both economic and environmental sense to move production to the United States. Miliband clearly wanted to keep the factory open; when sacked Vestas workers demonstrated against him at the Trade Union Congress, he awkwardly joined the applause, explaining that the firm had in fact refused an offer of government funds. Nor was it willing to convert the plant to make turbines for Britain. The British market is too small and too uncertain, he explained, mainly because of local objections to wind farms and a tortuous planning process.

A new planning authority will make it easier to get permission for renewable energy projects (and nuclear power plants) and give the government control over the energy grid. But Miliband's uncomfortable assertion of his government's powerlessness elides a deeper problem. Labour's faith in markets and its allergic response to any whiff of economic centralism stands in the way of Britain meeting its own renewable energy targets—30 percent by 2020. "The difficulties are partly ideological, with Britain increasingly taking the view that the solutions to these problems are market based," says Tony Juniper, a longtime environmental campaigner and former executive director of Friends of the Earth. "In Denmark, Germany and even Spain there's been a great deal of state intervention; that's why they're way ahead."

For all Labour's early talk about "joined-up thinking," it's obvious that on climate change the government's right hand doesn't know, or doesn't want to know, what its left hand is doing. Jonathon Porritt, former chair of Tony Blair's Sustainable Development Commission, says that key departments are still committed to "the old way of doing things" and to the large energy companies: "Without Ed Miliband coming in and banging heads together and saying this is un-

acceptable, we would still be back there.... The Treasury remains unpersuaded that you can have a productive economy and go low-carbon." Environmental campaigner and author George Marshall has a more hard-nosed view of the Treasury's reluctance: "The UK is setting itself up as the international carbon-trading capital. Two of the largest oil companies are based in Britain, as well as big mineral companies like Rio Tinto; you have to understand the policy in that context. Trading is what you do when you don't want to touch the supply."

There are lessons to be drawn from Vestas for the movement, too. The occupation was hailed as a breakthrough for red-green organizing, but it's easy for climate campaigners to make common cause with workers in green jobs. The challenge is to engage with those who have the most to lose from a low-carbon transition: power-plant workers and oil company employees, aviation technicians and airport catering staff, people who live on the edge of fuel poverty or who can barely afford a cheap flight to somewhere warm. The earnest young Trots from Workers' Climate Action who went down to Vestas succeeded in mobilizing a workforce who had never before taken action, and in pushing the government to put up funds for new wind-power research. But their stiff rhetoric of "class-conscious worker-led action" and "environmentalist working-class socialist revolutionary politics" may not wash so well in a less friendly setting or with more seasoned unions. Heathrow Airport is the biggest single-site employer in Britain; the national leaders of two of Britain's largest unions, GMB and Unite, are in favor of a third runway. Despite efforts by some activists and the local left-wing Labour MP, John McDonnell, to listen to their concerns, the airport's clerks and cleaners have not rushed to join in the protests there. Nor have the workers at coal-fired power plants been in a hurry to welcome a bunch of middle-class hippies who've come to shut them down.

In fact, the trade union movement has been doing its own unglamorous work toward a low-carbon transition, taking some inspiration from American pioneers like OCAW's Tony Mazzocchi. Paul Hampton writes on health, safety and environmental issues for the trade union-funded Labour Research Department; his recent survey of union representatives found many of them promoting green practices in their workplaces. "For union reps," he says, "this is going to grow as a political issue because of what the government and employers are doing." In every previous economic shift, from the Industrial Revolution to the closure of Britain's coal mines to globalization, working people have been treated as expendable. Just transition, he points out, "is still a contested concept, plastic enough to host a number of different interpretations. The government's version is predominantly market driven, but you could envisage a worker-led version that's much more bottom up."

It's for that reason that George Marshall's Climate Outreach and Information Network has launched a project called Climate Solidarity—with some government funding—to engage rank-and-file union members in the issue of climate change.

"There's been a total and systematic failure by the progressive left to take this issue on until very recently," says Marshall. "This is the biggest social and equality issue of all time—and our challenge to the unions is, Why have you handed it over to people you see as a bunch of middle-class tree-huggers? Greening the trade unions is the wrong way to think about it—what it's really about is bringing a left-wing union perspective to climate change." Kevin Smith, a Climate Camp veteran, makes a parallel argument: "We need to move beyond the whole conservation issue and see climate change in terms of power relations: what are the vested interests preventing us from moving forward?"

The climate movement, in all its biodiversity—from direct-action groups to traditional NGOs, from local transition towns to national campaigns, from academic researchers to community organizers—is coming out of the ghetto. Increasingly, climate change is understood as a social and political issue, a matter for mobilization, not individual choices. But the movement—and part of the government—is a long, long way ahead of most of the population, for

Increasingly, climate change is understood as a political issue, a matter for mobilization. But the movement is ahead of most of the population.

whom climate change remains an abstract anxiety; though they "believe" in it, they are much more concerned about rising fuel costs and supermarket prices. For all Ed Miliband's efforts to paint a rosy picture of a low-carbon future, to the majority the issue still smacks of Puritanism, smugness and self-denial. It's depressing, tedious, trendy; the government is hypocritical; there's no point in giving things up if the United States, China and India aren't going to do their bit.

We are now at a critical juncture, and not only because time is running out for us to limit global warming to a "livable" level. The climate crisis touches on every aspect of the world's political, social and economic organization. We have to change the direction of a massive juggernaut driven by profit and habit, and we have to do it fast. But not everyone who's pushing wants to turn it the same way.

The metaphor is crude, but it speaks to some of the hardest questions facing the climate movement, and indeed the negotiators at the Copenhagen summit, where a binding agreement has now all but been ruled out. Would almost any climate deal be better than none at all? Would an agreement based on carbon trading or one that is unfavorable to the poorest be better than a postponement? How can we make the right changes in the time we have to make them, broaden the base while sharpening the message, use the climate crisis as a catalyst for social justice rather than as a gun held by the powerful to the heads of the weak? Whatever happens in Denmark, we'll be having those debates for many years to come. ■



The Road to Copenhagen

1273 Wood- and coal-burning fires shroud English towns in smoke. Local regulations attempt to control the problem but fail. Atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ are about 280 parts per million (ppm).

Circa 1750 Industrial Revolution begins in Manchester, England. Coal powers the mills.

1827 French mathematician Jean-Baptiste Fourier suggests that the earth's atmosphere traps heat produced by the sun.

1859 Irish physicist John Tyndall confirms Fourier's theory that atmospheric gases like carbon dioxide trap heat. First oil well in United States is drilled in Pennsylvania.

1880s Various European inventors create experimental gasoline-powered automobiles.

1890 Standard Oil Trust controls 88 percent of US oil refining. By 1904 Standard Oil controls 91 percent of production and 85 percent of final sales.

1896 Swedish chemist Svante Arrhenius is the first to calculate that continued burning of coal and other fossil fuels will lead to a hotter earth; later wins a Nobel Prize.

1899 America's first environmental law is passed. The Rivers and Harbors Act makes it a misdemeanor to dump refuse into navigable waters without a permit.

1903 Henry Ford begins selling the gas-powered Model A automobile.

1904 America's first solar-powered electrical plant is built in St. Louis by the Willie Sun Power Company. Soon another plant is built, in the Mojave Desert at Needles, California. But within a few years Willie is driven out of business by cheaper coal/gas facilities.

1906 City of Pittsburgh creates a smoke inspector's office and passes ordinances to regulate local air pollution. Air improves.

1920 There are 7.5 million gas-powered cars in the United States.

1937 The term "greenhouse effect" is coined by Glenn Thomas Trewartha, a pro-

fessor whose obscure textbook on weather describes how water vapor, CO₂ and other gases act like glass in a greenhouse.

1948 Smog chokes the small industrial town of Donora, Pennsylvania. In five days twenty people die, and 6,000 are sick or hospitalized. Air pollution becomes a national political issue.

1952 London smog, the product of a thermal inversion, kills 4,000 people in two weeks. Four years later, England's Clean Air Act becomes law.

1958 Atmospheric CO₂ concentrations reach 315 ppm. In Hawaii, Dr. Charles Keeling begins the first continuous long-term study of atmospheric CO₂ levels. He discovers that levels are rising and that the rate at which they are rising is increasing. This is known as the Keeling Curve.

1962 Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* starts to give environmentalism mass appeal.

1963 First Clean Air Act in the US is passed into law. American smokestacks are subjected to pollution controls.

1965 At a meeting on causes of climate change in Boulder, Colorado, scientists note the chaotic nature of the climate system and the possibility of sudden shifts.

1969 "Earthrise," the first photograph of our planet taken from space, is published.

1970 First Earth Day, one of the largest demonstrations in US history, is held.

1969-73 Tricky Dick Nixon the Green? The National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act all become law. The Environmental Protection Agency is created.

1971 First international conference on climate change is held in Sweden. Scientists from fourteen nations debate: are greenhouse gases warming the world? Or is particulate pollution, like coal soot, shielding and thus cooling it? Some predict that global warming will become self-reinforcing if polar ice melts, reducing the earth's reflection of sunlight.

1972 First UN conference on the environment is held. The United Nations Environment Program is created. It will be the framework for international cooperation on environmental issues.

1973 Arab oil embargo begins in retaliation for the Yom Kippur War. Oil prices quadruple; gasoline is rationed in some states with the even/odd license plate number system.

1977 Wearing a wool cardigan, President Carter gives the first in a series of energy speeches. He asks Americans to turn down their thermostats and drive less.

1978 Fuel-economy regulations are introduced in the United States for passenger vehicles. New cars must now get at least eighteen miles per gallon.

Deng Xiaoping begins China's market reforms; a year later he introduces the one-child policy.

1979 Revolution in Iran sends oil prices surging, prompts "second oil crisis." Carter installs a solar-powered water heater on the White House roof; again urges energy conservation and admonishes that too many Americans "worship self-indulgence and consumption." This becomes the infamous "malaise speech."

1981 Election of Ronald Reagan brings environmental backlash. Interior Secretary James Watt says, "I do not know how many future generations we can count on before the Lord returns." Federal grants for solar energy are slashed. The solar water heater on the White House is junked. America's nascent alternative energy industry collapses.

1985 Hole in the ozone layer is discovered over Antarctica. Too much dangerous ultraviolet light is reaching earth. The hole is growing exponentially. Calls mount for international action to ban industrial use of ozone-depleting chlorofluorocarbons and hydrofluorocarbons.

Major International Climate Conference at Villach, Austria, warns that greenhouse gases will, "in the first half of the next century, cause a rise of global mean temperature which is greater than any in man's history." Scientists warn this could cause sea levels to rise by one meter.

1986 Atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ reach 350 ppm.

1987 Montreal Protocol is signed. The phaseout of ozone-depleting chemicals begins. By chance, these chemicals are also powerful greenhouse gases.

1988 Senator Al Gore holds hearings on climate change. NASA climate scientist James Hansen predicts rising sea levels and dangerous extreme weather by the end of the next century if fossil fuel consumption is not drastically reduced.

UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is created to act as a clearinghouse on climate science. Its findings are constrained by the need for the world's governments to approve them before publication.

1989 Global Climate Coalition, a front group funded by the oil, coal, auto and electric industries to promote the phony science of "climate skeptics," is created. Millions will be spent on this over the next decade, with Exxon one of the biggest spenders.

1990 First IPCC Assessment Report is published, becoming the basis for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

1992 At Rio Earth Summit, UN member states, including the United States, sign the UNFCCC, still the governing treaty on climate change. Its decisive sentence is the promise to stabilize greenhouse gas emissions in time "to prevent dangerous anthropogenic climate change." But there are no specific targets for emission reductions.

1993 Historical evidence of abrupt climate change becomes clear after analysis of Greenland's ice sheet. The new data show that in the past, dramatic climate shifts happened rapidly—over the course of years, not centuries.

1995 Second IPCC Assessment Report reveals mounting evidence of accelerated rate of warming.

1997 Kyoto Protocol is negotiated. Industrialized countries agree to reduce their collective greenhouse gas emissions to 5.2 percent below 1990 levels by 2012. US Senate refuses to ratify Kyoto.

1999 World's population reaches 6 billion and is projected to reach 7 billion by 2011.

2001 President George W. Bush renounces the Kyoto Protocol as bad for the US economy. Other nations carry on without the United States and continue their ratifications of the treaty.

Third IPCC Assessment Report describes as "very likely" a rapid and disruptive global warming unprecedented since the end of the last Ice Age.

2003 Lethal heat wave hits Europe. Hottest summer in 500 years kills 30,000–70,000 people; year of extreme weather costs an estimated \$60 billion.

2005 Kyoto treaty comes into effect and is eventually ratified by all major industrial nations except the United States. Work to reduce emissions accelerates in Japan, Western Europe and even among some US state and local governments.

Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma pound the Gulf Coast. Debate over the impact of global warming becomes more urgent in the United States.

2006 British government's Stern Report on the economic impacts of climate change says climate change will wreak havoc on the global economy if left unchecked. The report recommends keeping atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ below 450–550 ppm range. Environmentalists and scientists later counter that 350 ppm is the real limit, after which dangerous climate change is inevitable. Stern has since described 450 ppm as unsafe.

2007 IMF estimates cost of stabilizing greenhouse gases at \$1.8 trillion. IPCC calls for governments to begin planning adaptive measures. Its Fourth Assessment Report sees possibility of abrupt and irreversible climate change.

At a UN conference in Bali, governments agree to a timetable for negotiating a successor agreement to the Kyoto Protocol. Negotiations will conclude in Copenhagen, December 2009.

Al Gore and IPCC share Nobel Peace Prize.

In a victory over the Bush administration,

the Supreme Court rules, in *Massachusetts v. EPA*, that the Environmental Protection Agency has the authority to regulate CO₂ emissions.

Government of Australia's climate-denying right-wing Prime Minister John Howard falls as his country suffers a 1-in-1,000-year drought. The Labor Party challenger pledges strong action on climate change.

2008 Barack Obama is elected president of the United States; promises climate action. The polar bear is put on the US endangered species list because climate change is destroying its habitat.

Britain passes an ambitious Climate Change Bill mandating 80 percent reductions in emissions by 2050.

Oil exporter Norway plans to be the first country to be "carbon neutral," by 2030.

2009 January: Obama appoints Nobel laureate and renewable energy expert Steven Chu as energy secretary. **July:** At L'Aquila, Italy, the G-8 countries fail to agree on binding and radical greenhouse emission reductions. In reaction, China, India and other developing countries backtrack from earlier commitments. **August:** Meetings in Bonn end without major progress. Yvo de Boer, head of the UN climate secretariat, says, "If we continue at this rate, we're not going to make it." **September:** At "Climate Week" in New York, the UN holds an unprecedented gathering of more than 100 heads of government and state. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon wants to "get leaders moving." China's President Hu Jintao promises to reduce the growth of Chinese emissions "by a notable margin." Obama administration has vastly increased green energy spending but has made little progress on climate legislation. **October:** Talks in Bangkok end with no major agreement and the divide between the global North and South wider than ever. With only five days of negotiations remaining, a strong treaty in Copenhagen seems unlikely. **October 24:** Grassroots group 350.org coordinates a worldwide day of action on climate change, in which tens of thousands of people in 181 countries demand radical action to reduce emissions.

Atmospheric CO₂ concentrations reach 390 ppm.

Illustration: Janna Brower / Design: Steven Brower

Where's the Clean Energy?

Promising local initiatives are pointing the way forward for national policy.

by **ROBERT S. ESHELMAN**

It was in Germany that Ed Regan realized Gainesville, Florida, was going about things all wrong. The assistant manager at Gainesville Regional Utility (GRU) was out looking for ways to boost his city's renewable energy capacity. "Germany was a game-changer," Regan says. Wind turbines and solar panels seemed to be everywhere. He soon learned the secret.

Before Regan's June 2008 trip, the GRU was trying to promote small-scale renewable energy generation by offering hefty cash rebates to customers who installed solar photovoltaic panels. And it had a "net metering program" that allowed customers who generate their own power to run their electricity meters backward, thereby cutting their electric bills potentially to zero.

But the programs weren't attracting a great deal of interest. The utility's rebate program had yielded only 300 kilowatts of solar power capacity—roughly the amount of electricity used by 160 hair dryers—and it cost a lot of money.

The difference between Gainesville and Germany was that Germany had a national feed-in tariff. Under this system, energy consumers can become renewable energy producers by installing solar panels on their roof or a wind turbine in their backyard and selling their energy to the local utility. These customers-turned-producers receive above-market prices for their energy, often for up to twenty years. With the feed-in tariff, Germany boosted its renewable energy production from 1 percent of its total output in 1995 to 12 percent in 2005. By 2007 renewables supplied 14 percent of Germany's electricity. Denmark and Spain also have successful feed-in tariff programs.

So this past March, Gainesville rolled out its own feed-in tariff. GRU now pays twice the retail cost for every kilowatt of solar power-generated electricity. The extra cost means a small increase in electrical bills for all utility consumers, less than a dollar per month per household.

But in order to keep consumer prices down, the feed-in tariff is limited to expand by only 4 megawatts of solar photovoltaic capacity per year, for six years. And the first year's quota was snapped up in just two weeks. The program now has a waiting list through 2016. Rather than a bunch of homeowners each installing a few panels, the Gainesville quotas were mostly taken by commercial investors.

Among them is Dave Davis, a north Florida native who after sixty-five years in wholesale and retail gasoline distribution is getting into solar. "I have six acres out back where I am going to put



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the solar," says Davis, whose Southern drawl makes the word sound exotic, almost foreign: *sob-laar*. "I been on both ends of the oil companies," he says, "and I'd like to see a lot more solar here in Florida. A lot less dependency."

For Davis, the small solar farm represents income security for his heirs. But the larger wisdom of feed-in tariffs is also clear. Studies show that such laws boost green energy production. And feed-in tariffs transform the economic function of the electrical grid: no longer is it a centralized technological embodiment of corporate power and hierarchy. With

feed-in tariff legislation, electricity starts running both ways along the wires. And by extension, so does money and political power.

Perhaps that's what's keeping feed-in tariff legislation from spreading in the United States: it begins ever so slightly to break the near-monopoly of the private utilities. It creates new economic constituencies (small, clean-power producers), and it is a reassertion of the state's right to control its infrastructure.

Gainesville's solar program is one of many attempts to boost green energy production across the country. From California to Vermont, an increasing number of states and municipalities are moving to adopt feed-in tariffs and other innovative strategies for boosting clean energy production and reducing energy consumption.

Unfortunately, these efforts are Lilliputian in the face of climate change. The United States and other developed countries must cut carbon emissions by 80 to 95 percent over the next few decades to avoid very serious climate change. That goal is not impossible to meet. Numerous studies indicate that the United States could dramatically improve its renewable energy capacity if it had the right policies and financing. But in conversations with public officials, utility operators, small-scale energy producers and green energy advocates, one issue emerged again and again: the United States lacks long-term national clean energy planning. Basically, the government has done little to end the monopolistic hold that private utilities and fossil fuel industries have on energy policy.

First, though, some good news: more than thirty states have implemented renewable- or alternative-energy portfolio standards. These are policies that require electricity providers to obtain a minimum percentage of their power from renewable energy resources by a certain date. California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger recently increased his state's standard from 20 percent by 2010 to 33 percent by 2020. Several other states are shooting for 25 percent by 2025, with Hawaii aiming for 70 percent by 2030. And California, Hawaii, Wisconsin and Vermont all have feed-in tariff legislation.

"You can't really look at renewables in a vacuum, though,"

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says Terry Tamminen, a climate change expert at the New America Foundation. "The other side of the fight to reduce carbon emissions is energy efficiency. Progress on these two fronts makes me much more optimistic about what can be accomplished in meeting greenhouse-gas reduction targets."

Here, too, states are taking the lead. Passed in 1978, California's aggressive energy efficiency standards have reduced emissions by 30 million metric tons annually. That is equivalent to taking 6 million passenger cars off of the streets each year. Seven other states have set similar standards. Fifteen years ago, a two-kilowatt rooftop solar panel could meet 40 percent of a typical consumer's energy needs. Today, through technological improvements to most household heating and cooling systems and appliances, that same solar panel could meet 65 percent of that need. Not only are customers' bills declining; so are their carbon footprints.

The federal government continues to lag behind reform-minded states and municipalities. Both versions of climate change legislation under debate in Washington do little to boost clean energy production; the emission reduction targets are soft, and neither bill includes a feed-in tariff provision.

"The House bill and the drafts in the Senate are weak and wouldn't add anything to what states have already done," says Steve Clemmer, research director of the Union of Concerned Scientists' Clean Energy Program. Without long-term, stable planning at the national level, many investors will be too afraid to sink the huge sums of capital required to build out the massive clean energy infrastructure needed.

The one piece of federal support for clean energy that has existed for more than a decade is a set of production and investment tax credits for renewable energy projects. But Congress frequently allows these credits to lapse before reinstating them, thus creating market uncertainty that scares off investors who might otherwise be willing to build wind farms, solar plants or tidal power facilities.

"If the federal government only offers production tax credits for one or two or three years at a time, it doesn't give investors enough time to deploy capital and ensure it's there when projects come on line," explains Clemmer. Many projects depend on such credits to make money, so the threat of losing the credits drives investors elsewhere.

Opponents of green energy argue that it needs public subsidies because it cannot compete in a free market. Greens disagree: "The idea that we have a level playing field for alternative fuels production in the US is patently absurd," says Steve Kretzmann, executive director of Oil Change International. He and others point out that the government has given tax breaks, cheap recourse leases and direct investments to fossil fuel industries for more than a generation.

In just the past few years, from 2002 to 2008, coal, oil and natural gas companies received \$72.5 billion in subsidies, while the alternative energy sector benefited from \$29 billion—more than half of which went to biofuel industries, which are essentially the agribusiness lobby.

A robust federal clean energy policy would have positive

spinoff effects throughout the economy. Infinia Corporation, which builds concentrated solar power systems, illustrates this point: upward of 90 percent of its components come from—of all places—the automobile parts industry.

"When we speak to our suppliers," says an Infinia vice president, Peter Brehm, "they are very excited by the growth possibilities in clean energy, which contrast sharply with the lack of growth, or even contraction, in the automotive industry." Infinia employs just 150 people globally, but its example points to the potential for a green rehabilitation of the nation's battered manufacturing sector.

The Apollo Alliance, a national coalition of labor, business, environmental and community groups, estimates that a ten-year, \$500 billion investment would create more than 5 million green-collar jobs, many in the highly paid skilled-crafts sectors. A \$100 billion stimulus package spent over two years, according to the Center for American Progress, could net 2 million jobs in clean energy industries. Although projections of a clean energy-driven economic recovery vary, a strong consensus has emerged since last year's economic meltdown that a strong stimulus pack-

The government has done little to end the monopolistic hold that private utilities and fossil fuel industries have on national energy policy.

age promoting green energy could spur job recovery.

The Treasury Department recently allocated \$500 million in grants and tax breaks to renewable energy producers, bringing the Obama administration's total funding for green power industries to \$1 billion. The administration has committed to extending that amount to \$3 billion, which could bring about a doubling of renewable energy production. Even so, this amount remains a fraction of what fossil fuel industries receive.

Another problem is that the clean energy industry, such as it is, is hardly distinct from the old fossil fuel-dependent energy sector. Most utilities that invest in and sell green power also burn coal and gas. And their boards interlock with the fossil fuel industry.

Clean industry trade groups, like the American Wind Energy Association, have boards that include representatives from utility groups such as General Electric and T. Boone Pickens's Mesa Power. Is it any wonder that the alternative energy sector lacks a robust lobbying effort? After all, these are not environmental organizations; they are trade groups seeking profits for their members. And within their ranks lurk members that stand to lose millions through greater energy efficiencies or through requirements to shift toward renewables.

Meanwhile, the old fossil fuel sector lobbies hard. Through the first nine months of 2009 the oil and natural gas industries spent a staggering \$120.7 million on lobbying. Coal companies spent an additional \$10.4 million; electric utilities, \$108.2 million. Conversely, alternative energy industries—including biofuel companies—have spent \$23 million, with the

American Wind Energy Association alone accounting for a fifth of that amount. Most other renewables trade groups spend tens of thousands rather than millions of dollars.

The alternative energy sector's deficiencies aside, the problem remains one of federal action—or rather inaction. Damon Moglen, global warming director at Greenpeace, says, “We have the answers. We are not talking about developing new technologies in order to shift from fossil fuels to renewables.

We are talking about using available, off-the-shelf renewable energy systems to radically change the way we produce energy. Ultimately, it's a question of political will.”

In Germany, land of the feed-in tariff, local and state governments led the way for years, but eventually the federal government got on board. The question for Congress and the Obama administration is, When will they follow our states and municipalities, and fully embrace clean energy? ■

Zombie Nuke Plants

Our crumbling atomic power stations and the government agency that loves them.

by **CHRISTIAN PARENTI**

Oyster Creek Generating Station, in suburban Lacey Township, New Jersey, opened the same month Richard Nixon took office vowing to bring “an honorable peace” to Vietnam. This nuke plant, the oldest in the country, was slated to close in 2009 when its original forty-year license was ending. It had seen four decades of service, using radioactively produced heat to boil water into high-pressure steam that ran continuously through hundreds of miles of increasingly brittle and stressed piping.

If constructed today, Oyster Creek would not be licensed, because it does not meet current safety standards. Yet on April 8 the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC)—the government agency overseeing the industry—relicensed Oyster Creek, extending its life span twenty years beyond what was originally intended.

Seven days later workers at the plant found an ongoing radioactive leak of tritium-polluted water. Tritium is a form of hydrogen. In August workers found another tritium leak coming from a pipe buried in a concrete wall. Radiation makes metal brittle, so old pipes must be routinely switched out for new ones. The second leak was spilling about 7,200 gallons a day and contained 500 times the acceptable level of radiation for drinking water.

That leaking pipe had erroneously—or perhaps fraudulently—been listed in paperwork as replaced. How this error occurred remains unclear. What seems likely is that the plant's previous owner, GPU Nuclear, was deliberately skimping on maintenance as it approached the end of the plant's license. Then Oyster Creek was sold to Exelon and won relicensing. How many other mislabeled, brittle, old components remain in the plant's guts is impossible to determine without a massive audit and investigation. Unfortunately, stories like this are all



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too common: crumbling, leaky, accident-prone old nuclear plants, shrouded in secrecy and subject to lax maintenance, are getting relicensed all over the country.

In the face of climate change, many people who are desperate for alternatives to fossil fuels are considering the potential of nuclear power. The government has put up \$18.5 billion in subsidies to build atomic plants. As a candidate for president, John McCain called for forty-five new nuke plants.

Environmentalists have rightly pointed out the dangers this would entail. But new nukes are not the issue. As laid out in these pages last year [see Parenti, “What Nuclear Renaissance?” May 12, 2008], new atomic plants are prohibitively expensive. If enough public subsidies are thrown at the industry, one or two gold-plated, state-of-the-art, extremely expensive nuclear power stations may eventually be built, at most.

The real issue is what happens to old nukes. The atomic power industry has a plan: it wants to make as much money as possible from the existing fleet of 104 old, often decrepit, reactors by getting the government to extend their licenses. The oldest plants, most of which opened in the early 1970s and were designed to operate for only forty years, should be dead by now. Yet, zombielike, they march on, thanks to the indulgence of the NRC.

More than half of America's nuclear plants have received new twenty-year operating licenses. In fact, the NRC has not rejected a single license-renewal application. Many of these plants have also received “power up-rates” that allow them to run at up to 120 percent of their originally intended capacity. That means their systems are subjected to unprecedented amounts of heat, pressure, corrosion, stress and embrittling radiation.

These undead nukes are highly dangerous. But constant, careful (and expensive) inspection and maintenance would mitigate the risks. Unfortunately, the NRC does not require anything like that. And the industry often operates in a cavalier profit-before-safety style.

Christian Parenti, a Nation contributing editor and a fellow at The Nation Institute, is the guest editor of this issue. He is working on a book about climate change and violence.

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Ever since the first humans built a fire in their dark cave, people have realized the importance of proper indoor lighting. But ever since Edison invented the light bulb, lighting technology has, unfortunately, remained relatively prehistoric.

Modern light fixtures do little to overcome problems associated with improper lighting. As more and more of us spend longer and longer hours in front of our computer monitor, these problems are compounded. And the effects of improper indoor lighting are not necessarily limited to a physical problem: the quantity and quality of light can also play a part in both our mood and work performance.

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At the heart of the matter is the culture of the NRC. During his campaign Obama called the NRC “a moribund agency...captive of the industry that it regulates.” Unfortunately, since then Obama’s position has softened considerably.

The NRC is run by a five-member commission. When Obama came to office he inherited one open seat; another opened soon after. Filling those seats with safety-conscious experts not in thrall to the industry would have done much to change the culture of the NRC.

The president’s first move was a good one: he made commissioner Gregory Jaczko chair of the commission. Jaczko has openly questioned the safety culture of both the NRC and the industry and is respected among environmentalists as a serious and safety-oriented regulator.

But in October Obama nominated two people for the open seats. In classic fashion, he cut it down the middle. The relatively decent appointment, in the view of environmentalists, is George Apostolakis, a professor of nuclear science and engi-

The NRC not only fails to do its own research; it repeats the nuke industry’s boilerplate self-justifications when issuing new licenses.

neering at MIT. He sits on a safety oversight board within the NRC. His academic specialty is probabilistic risk assessment of complex technological systems, risk management and decision analysis.

“He is safety-minded,” says Ed Lyman, senior staff scientist for the Union of Concerned Scientists. “But I worry that his approach might be a little too theoretical, too academic. He might not be ready to really regulate the industry.”

The other nominee, William Magwood, is described by environmentalists as a disaster. Magwood worked at the Department of Energy as the director of its nuclear energy program. In that capacity, he acted as a booster for the industry. He’s made numerous public speeches promoting atomic energy. And most recently he worked as a consultant for the nuclear industry.

Because the NRC is an independent regulatory agency, the president’s nominees must be confirmed by the Senate. A key player there—notorious climate-science denier Senator James Inhofe, ranking member on the Environment and Public Works Committee—greeted the appointments with a backhanded compliment to the president: “At the very least, the selection of these individuals indicates President Obama understands the importance of the NRC in rebuilding our nation’s nuclear capabilities.” Given the source, this was damning praise indeed.

Lax safety culture at the NRC is at least in part a result of the revolving door between the atomic power business and the commission, including both middle- and upper-level staff. The most prominent example of this involved commissioner Jeffrey Merrifield, who championed accelerated licensing and other major policy initiatives that directly benefit-

ed the Shaw Group, the self-described “largest provider of commercial nuclear power plant maintenance and modifications services in the United States.” Twelve days after Merrifield left the NRC, in 2007, he became a top executive at—yes—the Shaw Group. Then, in late October of this year, after pressure from public interest groups, the NRC’s Office of the Inspector General found that Merrifield had violated government ethics rules by courting industry while still at the NRC.

This corrupt symbiosis between the industry and NRC is even found at the level of language. Critics say the staff habitually defers to the industry, rarely double-checking corporate assertions about safety. During relicensing, the NRC has used industry language verbatim in its reports. A recent random sampling of NRC relicensing reports conducted by its Office of the Inspector General found that almost half the language in the documents had been lifted verbatim or nearly so from industry applications. In other words, not only is the NRC failing to conduct its own research; it can’t even rewrite the nuke industry’s boilerplate self-justifications when issuing new licenses.

“Politically, the nuclear industry is very effective,” says Richard Webster, legal director of the Eastern Environmental Law Center, which represents five citizens’ groups fighting Oyster Creek. “If only they ran nuclear plants as well as they lobby.”

This cozy relationship is helped by the fact that the nuclear power industry’s drive for profit coincides with the NRC’s bureaucratic will to survive. If all the old plants were mothballed, the *raison d’être* of the NRC (and maybe much of the bureaucracy itself) would disappear.

Environmentalists describe the relicensing and up-rate process as highly opaque, rigged in the industry’s favor, designed to exclude public participation and marginalize opposition. They say safety is closely linked to transparency—which is in short supply.

Over the past two decades the NRC has also promulgated rules that effectively exclude from consideration many of the grounds on which the public could intervene to oppose relicensing. For example, the public cannot raise the issue of terrorism. Nor can it question maintenance plans, or waste storage plans, or even evacuation procedures.

The NRC’s Office of the Inspector General found that its own agency had “established an unreasonably high burden of requiring absolute proof of a safety problem, versus lack of reasonable assurance of maintaining public health and safety, before it will act to shut down a power plant.”

The parameters for relicensing are sometimes shockingly permissive. For example, Oyster Creek, only fifty miles from Philadelphia, lacks a reactor containment shell strong enough to withstand a jet crash. And the geography around the plant isn’t possible to evacuate: originally built in a rural area, the plant is now surrounded by sprawl. But the NRC takes none of that into account.

Even more amazing, Oyster Creek’s relicensing process did not require testing metals in the plant’s core for embrittlement. The containment shell, such as it is, was found to have been cor-



roded down to half its intended thickness. Citizens' groups had to file a lawsuit just to get the NRC to hold a public hearing that would yield a ruling. And that was the first one the NRC had held during more than forty-five relicensing processes.

Indian Point, forty miles north of Times Square, is also applying for a new license. It too leaks radioactive water like a sieve: tens of thousands of gallons of radioactive, tritium- and strontium 90-laced water from one of its spent fuel pools have polluted groundwater and the Hudson River. The first of several leaks was discovered in 2005, but the plant's owner, Entergy, failed to report the problem for almost a month.

Vermont Yankee, also owned by Entergy, has one of the worst operating records in the country, runs at 120 percent capacity because of a 2006 power up-rate, and is well on its way to being relicensed. As detailed in these pages last year, Vermont Yankee has recently suffered a number of almost comical problems: a fire set off emergency mobilizations in three states; a cooling tower collapsed; a crane dropped a cask of atomic waste; parts of a fuel rod even went missing. To save money Entergy has been caught skipping routine maintenance and not hiring needed staff. This year the plant has been battling what seem to be unending leaks: in February the water cleanup system leaked, in May a condenser tube leak was identified but not repaired, in June there was a leak in a service water pipe. Then a recirculation pump unexpectedly reduced power and locked up, preventing the operators from changing its speed. And in August Entergy announced that it was not doing all of the required monthly radiological monitoring of its spent fuel.

FirstEnergy's Davis-Besse Nuclear Power Station in Ohio also wants a new twenty-year license. In 2002 that plant came very close to calamity. Largely by chance, staff discovered a six-inch-deep hole in the reactor vessel head; only three-eighths of an inch of metal remained. This barrier protects against a reactor breach and a possible chain of events that could have led to a reactor meltdown. The hole could have been found and fixed earlier, but the plant's owner, FirstEnergy, requested that the NRC allow it to delay a mandated inspection. In October 2008 Davis-Besse workers also discovered a tritium leak.

This fleet of poorly regulated zombie plants is the real story of nuclear power. Building hundreds of new nukes to save us from climate change is a pipe dream—the time and expense necessary for that would be impossible to overcome in the decade or two remaining. And so the debate about the future of atomic power in the age of climate change functions mostly as a smoke screen behind which these old, leaky, crumbling plants are being pushed to the limit of their endurance. Half the fleet has already been relicensed and many up-rated to run at more than 100 percent of their designed capacity. To avoid dangerous accidents over the next two decades, the industry must be subject to real oversight. For that to happen, the NRC must be reformed.

There will likely be one more opening on the commission. If the risk of a real nuclear disaster is to be diminished, Obama must nominate a robust safety- and transparency-minded commissioner who will stand up to the powerful companies that own the zombie nuke fleet. ■

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Searching for CCS

Will carbon capture and sequestration help us avoid runaway climate change?

by HOLLY WREN SPAULDING

In September Britain's Royal Society, one of the world's most sober-minded scientific bodies, released a study on "geoengineering." A few years ago such ideas would have been considered crazy. Geoengineering was the realm of whacked-out paranoids obsessed with "contrails" and propeller-head tech geeks with no grasp of politics or economics. But the changes associated with a warmer world—polar ice melt, desertification and ocean acidification—are happening faster than predicted. At the same time, political efforts at climate change mitigation—such as the Copenhagen talks—are making very little progress. So scientists are rethinking the unthinkable: technological schemes to reshape the earth's climate, no matter how risky or expensive, are officially on the table.

Typically, geoengineering ideas range from deploying a massive fleet of sun-reflecting mirrors into orbit to filling the oceans with iron shavings that would trigger carbon-eating algae blooms. Scientists have even taken inspiration from the global cooling that followed a 1991 volcanic eruption in which 20 million tons of sun-diffusing ash entered the atmosphere. They are now exploring whether injecting sulfur into the atmosphere could lower the planet's thermostat.

But of all the ideas that are being considered, carbon capture and sequestration stands out because it might, just might, not be totally nuts. CCS involves a complicated process through which carbon dioxide is removed from fuels like coal and oil—or even from the air—and is then forced into spent oil wells, porous rock formations or under the ocean floor for long-term storage. Already there are a smattering of small CCS projects around the world. Most of them involve oil companies that pump CO₂ into active oil wells to help force up more petroleum in a practice known as enhanced oil recovery. A few companies use the CO₂ for industrial purposes, like carbonation of drinks.

A combination of available technologies are used to capture CO₂ before it escapes into the atmosphere. Postcombustion scrubs CO₂ from coal, gas or oil smoke after the fuel is burned; then, through the manipulation of temperature and pressure, the CO₂ is absorbed with solvents and recovered for storage. The technology is extremely expensive, but it has proven effective in retrofitted and new facilities. Precombustion capture, also called Integrated Gasification Combined Cycle technology, involves essentially cooking coal into a gas from which the CO₂ is easily stripped away and captured. In either case,



RYAN INZANA

the capture of CO₂ requires huge amounts of additional energy. Coal can also be burned in a process called oxy-fuel combustion, which captures more CO₂ than the other options mentioned here but is not compatible with older facilities and can be used efficiently only on new plants.

Also gaining attention is a technology designed to go after CO₂ already in the air—with the aid of artificial trees that imitate the carbon-capturing abilities of real ones. Klaus Lackner, a geophysicist at Columbia University, has invented a form of resin that absorbs

CO₂ when air passes through the material. Initial tests show that this technology is extremely effective at pulling CO₂ from the air and that the biomimetic "trees" could be installed anywhere, ideally by the thousands, much like a wind farm. Since there are already such high concentrations of CO₂ in the air, these "trees" would not need to be installed near a specific source and would instead capture emissions from airplanes, cars and other decentralized emitters. Lackner believes that each of his devices could remove one ton of CO₂ per day, which, he says, is 1,000 times faster than a real tree. The cost per "tree" is estimated at around \$30,000 and doesn't use excessive amounts of energy, says Lackner.

There is also a cutting-edge technology called "mineral storage," which can sequester dangerous CO₂ gas into safe, inert solids. Scientists at Columbia University recently discovered that a type of peridotite rock that exists in Oman, New Guinea, California and other places naturally captures vast quantities of CO₂ by pulling it from the air and transforming the gas into mineral solids—calcium carbonate and magnesium carbonate. But does enough peridotite rock exist to make a real difference? And how would captured CO₂ be delivered to these rocks?

But the real question for any of these methods—beyond who would organize and pay for them—is what to do with the CO₂ after it is captured. For one thing, leaks could be lethal—concentrated CO₂ asphyxiates. A natural version of this happened in Cameroon in 1986 after a volcanic eruption caused the bottom of Lake Nyos to belch out a cloud of CO₂, killing 1,700 people and hundreds of cattle over a range of twenty-five kilometers.

If CCS goes commercial, the storage of this dangerous gas would need to be regulated—a prospect that does not exactly excite energy producers. "What I heard industry saying is that they don't want to be compelled to do real-time monitoring... and they don't want a public process," says Lee Sprague, who manages the Clean Energy Campaign for the Michigan chapter of the Sierra Club. He says communities need to become

Holly Wren Spaulding is a poet and writer based in Leelanau County, Michigan.

engaged when a CCS project is under consideration and make sure public health and safety officials are prepared for potential emergencies.

Whatever the combination of technologies, CCS on a large scale would be fabulously expensive. And it would have a meaningful impact on the climate only if it were an adjunct to rapid industrial transformation away from fossil fuels toward a clean-energy economy.

The biggest problem with CCS is not so much its expensive, experimental, high-tech aspects but the twisted political discourse surrounding it. These days CCS functions as a canard, a misleading ruse, set afloat by the coal industry to greenwash its image. Billboards around Appalachia read, "Coal: cleaner greener power for the people and protection for the environment." The political class happily falls in line behind the marketing because coal states are swing states. As a result, candidates from both major parties bloviate about their commitment to "clean coal"—a thing that manifestly does not exist. CCS also offers middle-class consumers the salve of hope: it suggests that we can carry on with our profligate ways—that we can have our fossil fuel and burn it too.

For these reasons, most radical environmentalists reject CCS technology as unworkable—and a distraction from the real issue of cutting emissions. Greenpeace has been especially ardent in its denunciation. But the Environmental Defense Fund has lobbied on behalf of CCS, and the World Wildlife Fund and Sierra Club remain equivocal. Meanwhile, Energy Secretary Steven Chu is considering its merits. The Energy Department is backing further research and development of CCS with hopes of seeing commercial deployment within the next ten years. Among green luminaries, NASA's chief climate scientist, James Hansen, is known to have suggested that CCS might have some use, though he remains focused on a larger goal: an international moratorium on coal power.

As the climate shifts and warms, Arctic ice melts—releasing massive amounts of methane, a hugely powerful greenhouse gas that is twenty times more damaging than CO₂. This in turn accelerates global warming, which drives the melting in the Arctic. After a certain point, emissions reductions will be unable to counter such fierce positive feedback loops. In light of such sobering facts, CCS has become a topic of increasing interest among those thinking through the climate challenge.

The world's leading politicians like to say that an atmospheric CO₂ concentration of 450 parts per million is the tipping point. But most climate scientists, including Hansen, believe the real threshold is 350 ppm. The really bad news is we are already at 390 ppm and increasing by 2 ppm per year. Because CO₂ lingers in the atmosphere for at least 100 years, even a total and immediate cessation of all emissions would not be enough to arrest dangerous warming trends. And the best-case scenario that might come from Copenhagen will not come anywhere close

to what we need. As the world's mitigation efforts plod along, CCS could provide triage, allowing us to adapt to a more chaotic climate, and for high-energy users like the United States and China to make the transition to a low-carbon economy.

For now, the Obama administration is restarting the once canceled public-private partnership FutureGen, which promises near zero emissions from gasified coal in Mattoon, Illinois. Once operational, this \$1.5 billion pilot project would be the first commercial-scale CCS facility in the country. As it turns out, a report released by the House of Representatives in March found that "FutureGen appears to have been nothing more than a public relations ploy for Bush Administration officials to make it appear to the public and the world that the United States was doing something to address global warming despite its refusal to ratify the Kyoto Protocol." In other words, whereas the former administration had no interest in

Industrial-scale CCS would be fabulously expensive and would have a meaningful impact only as an adjunct to rapid emission reductions.

CCS except for greenwashing purposes, President Obama is inclined to give it a try. But even if FutureGen 2.0 takes off, it will power only 150,000 homes, which breaks down to a cost of \$10,000 per home!

Meanwhile, in 2010 the Energy Department expects to spend nearly \$180 million on site selection, permits, community outreach, technological innovation and testing of current CCS technologies, plus \$41 million more focused on innovations at existing coal plants using precombustion technologies. In addition, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 provides \$3.4 billion for CCS-related programs, including funding for the Clean Coal Power Initiative, carbon capture and energy-efficiency improvement projects, geologic sequestration training and research grants.

In Congress, the Waxman-Markey bill in the House and the Kerry-Boxer bill in the Senate are being referred to as "climate legislation," though each is a confusing mix of green jobs, subsidies to the fossil fuel industry, proposed offsets, weak targets for emission reductions, inadequate support for renewable energy and efficiency measures, and funding for CCS research and deployment. Waxman-Markey would create a quasi-governmental Carbon Storage Research Corporation with a board made up of representatives from rural electric cooperatives, public utilities, fossil fuel producers and nonprofit environmental groups, among others. This body would be charged with initiating CCS demonstration and deployment projects, and promoting its commercial adoption. The bill also proposes a tax on users of fossil fuel electricity that would generate \$1 billion annually to be used on CCS projects. The greater goal of the bill is to invest \$60 billion in CCS technology by 2025.



Waxman-Markey also proposes that any coal plants built between 2009 and 2020 employ CCS as it becomes available. By 2025, all plants built after 2009 would have to be retrofitted to capture at least 50 percent of their CO₂ output, with the capture target rising over time. Sounds good—on paper. However, energy companies are unlikely to accept the additional costs associated with retrofitting for CCS, and industry backers are no doubt already hard at work trying to persuade legislators to weaken provisions or kill the bill outright.

If implemented, could Waxman-Markey or Kerry-Boxer or their hybrid really create industrial-scale CCS? If all plants built after 2009 eventually had to sequester half of the carbon they emitted, would that have much impact? A study by the Norwegian NGO Bellona set out to discover the potential of

this technology and found that CCS could eventually capture 236 billion tons of CO₂—or 33 percent of global emissions—by 2050. Yet much about CCS is speculative, and there may be years of expensive research to do before it will even begin to make good on its promises. For now, the usual suspects remain deeply invested in cheap fossil fuels and the massive subsidies these fuels receive. CCS remains on the horizon, a shimmering, blurry possibility, and a mirage-like suggestion of hope that we can pull back to somewhere below 350 ppm of atmospheric CO₂ concentrations before it is too late.

CCS is not the solution to the climate crisis. As one proponent of geoengineering admitted, it “is simply a temporary ‘stay of execution.’ We will still have to work for a pardon.” And that comes in only one form: radically and rapidly reducing emissions. ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

sen them. The king of the gods even provides his earthly counterparts with a royal staff to prove their provenance: “the sceptre-bearing king, whose powerful authority comes from Zeus” (*The Iliad*).

DOUGLAS O’KEEFE

Robin Replies

BROOKLYN, N.Y.

Joan Aleshire claims that Isaiah Berlin never became a neoconservative. I agree, which is why I declined to say that he did. What I did say was that he was a counter-revolutionary—Berlin’s opposition to revolutionary politics and the generative effect of that opposition on his thinking are well-known—and a Hobbesian. One piece of evidence I cited in support of the latter claim was Berlin’s statement that freedom “is not incompatible with some kinds of autocracy.”

Aleshire states that I am quoting “without citation or context.” Fair enough. The citation is Berlin’s essay “Two Concepts of Liberty” (1958), and here’s some context: after making the statement, which he says is the third “and more important” attribute of his preferred account of liberty, Berlin defends it in two lengthy paragraphs, in which he mentions among other things the happy experience of “men of imagination, originality and creative genius” under the repressive rule of Frederick the Great and Joseph II. “Carefully qualified”? I don’t think so. Aleshire’s statement that Berlin’s time in the Soviet Union “would have led him to a different conclusion” seems plausible—until one remembers that it didn’t.

It is Douglas O’Keefe, I’m afraid, who errs when he writes that the theory of the divine right of kings dates back to Homer. Divine right is more than a simple claim about the godly sources of a king’s rule. It holds that only the king’s power is divine in origin, that the king is bound only to God, and that his power should not be limited by or shared with other people or institutions. Prior accounts, especially in the Middle Ages, had treated all forms of political power—whether the king’s or the nobility’s, the law or the courts—as divine in origin; power was thus to be exercised by many rather than one. That is why Carlisle’s statement in *Richard II* is more plea than prescription and is definitely not description: after all, Richard has just agreed to hand over his throne to Bolingbroke, and for his ill-timed eloquence Carlisle will be arrested for treason. Before abdicating, Richard says, “God save the King! Will no man say amen?” Not exactly the stuff of absolutism.

COREY ROBIN

Leonard Cohen Plays Tel Aviv

EAST ORANGE, N.J.

We are great admirers of Leonard Cohen’s brilliant poetry and music, which has always reflected not only artistic inspiration but also a profound, if subtle, social critique. Consequently, we were all the more disappointed and saddened by his September concert in Tel Aviv in defiance of the cultural boycott of Israel, even in the face of the opposition of Amnesty International and thousands of others. This essential fact is omitted from David Yaffe’s otherwise comprehensive

“Waiting for the Miracle” [Oct. 26].

Leonard’s creative vision, his Buddhist practice and his Jewish faith should all have schooled him to stand at the side of the victim, no matter the cost. The increasingly cruel repression and killing of Palestinians, the accelerated building of illegal settlements and the apartheidlike restriction of freedom of movement now summon all people of conscience to take a stand. Not even the recent, objective Goldstone Report brought any semblance of shame to the Israeli government, or to our own, which also rejected it. (The fact that Hamas is not investigating the lesser, but still serious, charges against it is unfortunate but is no excuse for any of the ongoing Israeli atrocities.)

Neither Leonard’s compromise offer of another concert in the West Bank nor giving the concert proceeds to a good cause was acceptable to most Palestinians or many others. The boycott of South Africa ultimately succeeded because it was uncompromising.

We strongly share the courageous sentiments of Neve Gordon, Israeli scholar and peacemaker, about the urgency of the boycott: “I am convinced that it is the only way that Israel can be saved from itself.” This is the vision that an artist of Leonard Cohen’s brilliance and value system should embrace. THE REV. DANIEL BERRIGAN, SJ
THE REV. PAUL MAYER

Correction

In Ed Morales’s “Outrageous Fortuño” [Nov. 30], Puerto Rico was mischaracterized as having been an incorporated—instead of an unincorporated—territory.

Books & the Arts.



JUSTIN IDE/HARVARD NEWS OFFICE

Michael Sandel lectures to students enrolled in his course "Justice" at Harvard University's Sanders Theatre.

This Seeming Brow of Justice

by SAMUEL MOYN

Every fall they pack Sanders Theatre to the rafters. A spellbinding philosopher takes the stage before a rapt crowd of Harvard students, and soon enough the cavernous space becomes a classroom where the bright shades of Aristotle, Jeremy Bentham, Immanuel Kant and John Rawls are summoned to have their say on the enduring questions. What is the good life? Is pleasure the highest end, or is something else? Are acts moral because they lead to good consequences, or because they are done on principle? To keep the discussion grounded, the class—called simply "Justice," it now regularly enrolls more than 1,000 undergraduates—is asked to confront these quandaries in the context of hard cases brought to life by the philosopher's trademark hypothetical situations or policy dilemmas culled from newspaper articles.

For Michael Sandel, justice is not a spectator sport—at least not in Sanders Theatre,

where he expects engagement from the first. He asks a question, and an answer is voiced by an anonymous face in the crowd. Even students too shy to raise their hands are drawn into testing their moral intuitions against prominent theories. The exposure to classic texts at leading universities usually succeeds in giving students the ability to drop canonical names—the sort of cultural distinction elite institutions provide in their continuing role as glorified finishing schools. That Sandel has managed to elevate the conversation is a miraculous accomplishment. Over the years, more than 14,000 Harvard students have participated in it, and now Sandel is trying to broaden the audience. *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?*, a new book closely based on his course, comes on the heels of the publication of his *Justice: A Reader*, a selection of essential primary texts. Together with a PBS series based on the course airing this fall, the books allow anyone to follow Sandel's commentary at home and enjoy a close approximation of a signature Harvard course (without the sticker shock).

Since Socrates argued that philosophy

Justice

What's the Right Thing to Do?

By Michael J. Sandel.

Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 308 pp. \$25.

The Idea of Justice

By Amartya Sen.

Belknap/Harvard. 467 pp. \$29.95.

must concern itself with human affairs and not just heavenly things, inquiries into abstract justice have revealed as much about their place and time as anything else. (The same is true of the actual pursuit of justice, ever since the Hebrew Bible enjoined it.) As it happens, the publication of Sandel's *Justice* coincides with the release of a very different kind of book on the subject—*The Idea of Justice*—written by his Harvard colleague Amartya Sen, an accident that calls for more than a philosophical discussion. Although *Justice* doesn't fully succeed in bottling the formula of Sandel's class—how could it?—it is easily the most accessible primer on the topic now available. But Sandel aspires to do more than merely vulgarize the available

Samuel Moyn teaches European history at Columbia University. His new book, on the history of human rights, will appear next year.

positions in political theory and explore them through contemporary examples: he is calling, as he long has, for nothing less than a reinvigoration of citizenship. As for Sen, his pressing concern is not the lifting of a nationwide malaise but the alleviation of global immiseration, and it drives him to propose a radically different approach to justice. Notwithstanding these discrepancies of interest and scope, however, the two men converge in a striking omission. To make sense of it, one must ask how their theories of justice reflect not just the universal and eternal but also the here and now—most notably, the cold war's lingering hold on liberal philosophy.

Sandel's book is organized as an excursion through three main theories of justice—one based on welfare, one on freedom and one on virtue—and like the best teachers, Sandel gives each theory its due. But the excursion is also de-

Sandel argues for the priority of the communal good in an account of justice.

signed to undercut the first two theories in order to prepare the ground for the third. The theories of justice are sequenced like dominoes: the views Sandel rejects fall as the book goes on, and his favorite approach turns out to be the last one standing.

Sandel's discussion of welfare begins with Bentham's famous definition of justice as "the greatest happiness for the greatest number." This formulation could justify a commitment to market distribution, if it were shown to be the best means for promoting the general welfare. But pleasure is not the only good, and there is no common measurement for things as different as love and money. In any case, the quest for aggregate happiness also risks running afoul of personal rights. It is absolutely true that personal freedom matters, whether in a libertarian version that insists on noninterference and contract, or more egalitarian schemes—like those of Kant and Rawls—that square individual freedom with equal freedom for all others. Libertarianism, however, is compromised by the mistaken assumptions of self-ownership: if personal attributes—Michael Jordan's basketball prowess, in Sandel's example—are themselves unearned, then the earnings that follow from them should not all necessarily flow to Jordan's bank account. Moreover, no one would base justice solely on consent

alone, a point borne out by Sandel's vivid story of the German man who recently agreed to be eaten. (The fact that he had approved his own death and fricasseeing, the judge unsurprisingly concluded, could not keep his killer out of jail.) Kant and Rawls, for their part, fairly consider the modern aspiration for autonomy but fail to make sense of the claims of loyalty, solidarity and memory. Their thinking is hobbled by the notion of a human being who is a free agent before anything has defined him or her.

Sandel concludes by calling for a scheme of justice revolving around the collective good life of virtuous citizens. But from this appeal also flows the principal worry about his enterprise. Sandel plausibly contends that devotion to a scheme of the good life as controversial as collective virtue sets him against the aspiration to neutrality that characterizes much contemporary liberal thought. A full-bodied public commitment to ranking ways

of living would suggest that basic values are not necessarily a private matter, as most liberals insist. It would praise virtues and condemn vices, and therefore involve officious interference with autonomy, which is why

liberals typically avoid legislating morality. But despite his principled rejection of neutrality, Sandel ends up being rather coy about the exact theory of virtue he is championing, for today's Americans or in general. To explain his stance, it's necessary to trace his philosophical roots and consider how he has chosen to define his role as a public moralist in an age especially unaccommodating to his views.

Nearly thirty years ago, in his massively influential debut in political theory, Sandel argued that communal belonging precedes individual freedom—that, in his language, the self is "encumbered" and therefore not altogether prior to the ends it chooses. An intrepid technical dissection of his colleague Rawls's epoch-making *A Theory of Justice* (1971), *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* made Sandel's name as a "communitarian." Sandel demonstrated that for Rawls, the freedom of individual choice alone is the morally relevant starting point for inquiry into justice, an assumption that renders things like family ties, religious belief, group loyalty and historical identity irrelevant, except as a secondary extra. Communitarians like Sandel, Charles Taylor (with whom Sandel studied as a Rhodes scholar at Oxford) and Michael Walzer responded that most people, even in liberal societies, prize those things at least as

much as personal autonomy. The most attractive part of Sandel's criticism was his contention that relationships, rather than being the result of previous choices, are the sphere in which identity is possible at all. (To put it in more technical terms, there is no individual subject not intersubjectively constituted from the first.) Ever since making these claims, even as political theory has substantially evolved, Sandel has continued to argue for the priority of the communal good in an account of justice, even as he recognizes its risks for liberty.

Those risks are sobering. In the classic ancient model of Aristotle's thought, which Sandel showcases in *Justice*, the canonization of virtue depended on a more general belief in a teleologically organized universe, one in which the reasons for the existence of everything, and not simply everyone, came built in. Not only did modern science unseat that view but—as Sandel recognizes—the argument for collectively given ends can be an affront to human freedom. "Communal encumbrances can be oppressive," he acknowledges. In the precepts of traditional religions, meanwhile, moral obligation and collective inclusion come at the notoriously high price of restrictive moralism, without even Aristotle's commitment to furnishing a rationale for the code of ethics being outlined.

To his credit, Sandel proposes to retain only parts of the ancient legacy for a modern account of justice. Unlike a few of his colleagues—Alasdair MacIntyre, for example, or some Straussians who see modernity as a moral catastrophe—Sandel wants collective virtue to invigorate liberal democracy instead of standing as a full-scale alternative to it. But perhaps what's most surprising about Sandel's career is that while he has argued that some vision of the good life must provide the first basis of a theory of justice, he has—given his critique of the aspiration to neutrality—remained surprisingly neutral toward various models of communal morality that might claim our allegiance. The peculiar result is that unlike Rawls, Sandel has abstained all along from offering any programmatic "theory of justice." He has limited himself to arguing that justice demands collective identity first, without getting specific.

There are a few probable reasons why. One is that vague appeals to a good shared in common allow Sandel to build a broad coalition while postponing inevitable disputes about its precise mission. It offers the false sense of a common agenda to people who in fact do and should differ. Nowhere is this clearer than in his

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sympathy for potential religious sources of collective ideals. Sandel recognizes that in contemporary America the priority of communal virtue is most appealing to the religious right, and his hymns to community often contain strong hints that religious perspectives could or should help define it. This approach will not satisfy those who need to know the exact moral dimensions of a religiously inflected definition of the good life before agreeing to its public endorsement. Should one champion the injection of religion in collective politics without first being clear about what it would really mean?

This concern is pressing even for the right, but it is especially serious for the left, where Sandel's sympathies seem to lie. Progressives,

including his explanation of how to endorse one version of religion rather than another, is nowhere to be found in his writings. All things considered, it would be foolish to rush in just because fundamentalists do.

What is true of Sandel's strategic or vague endorsement of religion as a fund of collective morality is true of his general approach to justice. It need hardly be stated that there are secular visions of the common good that compete with various religious ones. Despite continuously advocating a politics of the common good, Sandel offers next to no means to help decide which of many rival proposals about the morally preferable life for people in common is best. It is all very well to champion a renewed citizenship, but—especially for a critic of neutrality—not without some more contentious indication of its foundation and implications.

There is likely a historical reason for Sandel's reticence. His first appearance

in the *New York Times*, long before he became a professor who contributed op-eds on moral issues in contemporary politics, was in 1975, as part of the paper's spring review of commencement speeches. In his valedictory address at Brandeis, Sandel bemoaned the passing of the activist spirit of the 1960s, with its notion of citizenship wedded to public engagement and reform. It had already given way, Sandel ruefully noted, to moral "emptiness," as attention shifted "from the shortage of good in the world to the shortage of goods." Sandel has often invoked Robert F. Kennedy as the politician who promised to make virtuous citizenship, rather than rights and markets, the compass of liberalism. Strikingly, Sandel is still making the case decades later, but at a time when large social movements are even more of a dim memory. Absent new models, the nostalgia for a collectivist model of liberalism has been Sandel's fate, more than his choice, in an age of conservative ascendancy.

His attempt to shelter a guttering flame—if that is what in fact defines his role as public moralist—would be honorable, except that it critically affects how he has thought about justice, and taught it. Leaving aside what are either strategic feints toward religion or unacceptable failures to explain why religion should cut left instead of right, Sandel has ended up aligning his collectivism with Aristotle's ancient virtue ethics rather than the modern social movements that inspired him. Correspondingly, what's glaringly absent from Sandel's otherwise generous

survey of theories of justice is the approach to the subject that has been the dominant one in modern times in the West, especially on the left and among social movements: justice as collective freedom and empowerment.

In his rambling over the territory, Sandel presents theories of justice that champion freedom as the basis for personal rights—or at most, egalitarian norms. In principle, for Sandel, the communitarian alternative is necessarily a strike against freedom rather than a theory of it. Absent from his canon, similarly, are philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, G.W.F. Hegel and their followers, for whom ancient virtue could not be revived without reinventing it as a doctrine of collective emancipation. Sandel seems, in fact, to long for this tradition (he has mentioned Hegel, and had warm praise for his follower John Dewey, in other contexts). But he has opted not to advocate for it, or even make room for it, in the survey of *Justice*.

Sen argues that the obsession with a complete blueprint of social justice is a distraction.

he warns, are mistaken to react to conservative appeals to "values" by opposing all such talk as intrusive instead of providing their own better set. He writes in *Justice*, as he has written before: "Fundamentalists rush in where liberals fear to tread." Clearly, his heart is with a reinvention of liberalism based on appeals not simply to morality generally but also to religion specifically. "Not only the Taliban, but also abolitionists and Martin Luther King, Jr., have drawn their visions of justice from moral and religious ideals," he explains. And most revealing, Sandel is thrilled by Barack Obama's praise for the necessary role of religion in American politics.

Yet Sandel never squarely addresses the hard question of how to make religion a valuable source for progressive change, nor does he take up the question of whether it's justifiable to emphasize the progressive rather than conservative strains of existing religions, in their own moral doctrines or in contemporary politics. Sandel is probably right that Obama's elevation of religion as a moral source in contemporary life is good politics. But it is only "good political philosophy," Sandel implies, if a thinker is willing to engage in a contentious struggle to explain why religion can and should be freed from its distant past of subjugation in the name of revealed truth, and its recent history of conservatism in the name of the "moral majority." In an era of so-called new atheism, in short, it remains surprising to see Sandel frequently gesture toward the moral dimensions of religion when a defense of the moral credentials of religion,

The *Idea of Justice* is a very different book: Amartya Sen offers a theoretical argument so richly and lovingly detailed that its central objective has to be teased out of a tangle of specialist debates and engrossing digressions. At the end of his book Sandel insists that the scandal of economic inequality is one of the principal reasons to mobilize for the collective good; but apart from a tangential affirmation of local solidarity, he shows little interest in the issue of transnational justice, notably the battle against worldwide poverty, even though it is today the burning topic in the field. By contrast, a major feature of Sen's approach is his introduction of what he calls "global perspectives" into discussions of justice. He blends an expansion of geographical scope with a theory that insists on a more realist brand of reform, in which political theory is not about drafting blueprints for castles in the air but comparing feasible next steps for improving the world as it stands.

Sen, who is a generation older than Sandel, was born in 1933 in the town of Santiniketan in West Bengal, the home of the educational utopia founded by the Indian poet and humanist Rabindranath Tagore. (Sen's mother was a disciple of Tagore.) In a career spanning nearly half a century, Sen has scaled the peaks of Anglo-American academia, enjoying long spells at Oxford and Harvard, where he teaches today after a recent interlude as a Cambridge don. A Nobel laureate in economics, Sen confesses that philosophy is his "love affair." Even as he has thrown himself into criticizing the assump-

tions of his home discipline, he has profoundly shaped the field of development at the United Nations, where he has campaigned against the inadequacy of a narrow GDP measurement of well-being. And all along, Sen has pursued the more abstract problems of academic political thought at a very high level. Though *The Idea of Justice* is much more a synthesis of his disparate contributions to the field than a fundamentally new theory, it is clearly the place to start for ascertaining how his views fit together into a

unique and inspiring position on justice.

Sen has little use for Sandel's communitarianism. He sees in the diversity of cultures not challenges for universalism but historical sources of its precepts, and he likes to cite Indian traditions as authority for his moves within Anglo-American liberalism. (Akbar, a Mughal emperor in the sixteenth century, has Sen's special admiration for his commitment to pluralistic toleration.) Still, like Sandel's earliest work, *The Idea of Justice* is essentially an analysis and criticism of John Rawls's po-

litical thought. And in retrospect, it seems clear that after successive utilitarian, libertarian and communitarian waves of assault on Rawlsian liberalism, it is the demand for global justice that has proved to be the most serious undoing of Rawls's system. Even Rawls's faithful disciples, like Thomas Pogge of Yale, were appalled when, late in life, the great Harvard philosopher confirmed that he thought about the nation-state as the natural forum for justice, with international justice a secondary consideration and mostly reduced

In Our Orbit Missed Chances

by JOCHEN HELLBECK

Stephen F. Cohen's *Soviet Fates and Lost Alternatives: From Stalinism to the New Cold War* (Columbia; \$28.50) left this reader oscillating between disillusionment and hope. Disillusionment in the face of an account of how visions of political reform and reconciliation propounded by the likes of Nikolai Bukharin or Mikhail Gorbachev were crushed in ugly power struggles in the Soviet Union and even expunged from the historical record. But hope, too, for it seems that even though manuscripts may burn, political alternatives have a life span of their own. They can outlast their authors and enjoy a resounding revival, with a delay. In a final twist, Cohen, a historian at New York University, a political commentator and frequent contributor to *The Nation*, brings his story of Soviet and Russian political alternatives to the doorstep of the White House, to powerful effect.

The book begins in Moscow's Lubyanka prison, where Bukharin, one of the first Bolsheviks, spent the last days of his life furiously sketching the contours of a socialist humanist order. (Several of Bukharin's prison manuscripts, including an autobiographical novel, poems on world history and a treatise on *Socialism and Its Culture*, were later found in Stalin's archive, published and translated into English.) In having Bukharin executed on charges of "anti-Soviet" activities, Stalin sought to cast him out from the Bolshevik pantheon; but, as Cohen later shows, he could not suppress Bukharin's ghost. Astoundingly, when the Gulag was disbanded after the dictator's death, a com-

mitment to reform endured among some of Stalin's political prisoners. A small number of these *zeks* (the colloquial acronym for prisoner) unexpectedly appeared near the power center in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union. Called "Khrushchev's *zeks*," admirably by some, derisively by others, they were a vital force behind the policies of the Thaw, and they even persuaded Khrushchev to consider building a national memorial to Stalin's victims. Fearing the effects of such a momentous turn against the recent past, the Soviet establishment had Khrushchev removed from power. The monument awaits construction to this day.

Even fewer former *zeks* were in Gorbachev's vicinity when he became general secretary in 1985. Yet the memory of Bukharin's alternative vision remained a driving force in his quest to devise a socialism with a human face. This memory was partly transmitted by Cohen himself: a translation of his *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, published in 1980, had come into Gorbachev's hands early in his tenure as general secretary. An avid student of Soviet history, Gorbachev understood that for his reform vision to work, it could not be decreed from above; instead, it required the people's consent and active support from below.

As he democratized the Soviet order, Gorbachev relinquished crucial powers available to him as an authoritarian ruler. Others, notably the power-hungry Boris Yeltsin, took advantage. Cohen is indignant about Yeltsin's illegal "coup" of December 1991, which brought the Soviet Union to an end. He also blames Yeltsin for an active policy of "de-democratization," evident in the president's violent shutdown of the Parliament in 1993, and for his privatization of property of the former USSR, which foreshadowed the spirit and practices of the Putin administration. This view may surprise those Western readers who regard Yeltsin as a democratic hero. For Cohen,

such a characterization is a telling misrepresentation; it shows how unreceptive the West was to the idea of a reformed Soviet regime, and how quickly and without due reflection it celebrated the end of the Soviet Union as a breakthrough for democracy. Indeed, Cohen also reminds us that beyond democratizing the Soviet Union, Gorbachev was also the architect of New Thinking in Soviet-American relations. Yet the foundations he laid for an equal, strategic partnership were also abandoned—this time by a succession of US administrations that recast the demise of the Soviet project as a story of American triumphalism.

Cohen's book concludes with an appeal to President Obama to restore the lost strategic partnership with Russia, which the author regards as vital for the United States' long-term security interests. For Cohen, Washington today is eerily reminiscent of Moscow in 1985: a young new leader surrounded by advisers from an earlier age, too entrenched in old ways to see to new shores. That Cohen's analysis of past lessons not learned will find Obama's ear, as his earlier analysis found Gorbachev's a quarter-century ago, is unlikely. After all, communist regimes were caught up in a unique pathos of history, which turned the writing or rewriting of history into political dynamite: witness Bukharin's prison writings, Khrushchev's rehabilitation policies, Gorbachev's recourse to Bukharin. Even Vladimir Putin, a sober and cold-blooded man by all accounts, is known for his prolonged excursions into the field of history. Still, Cohen sees Obama as capable of launching an agenda of New Thinking in Gorbachev's tradition. "Is American democracy," he asks, "any less capable of such an alternative than was the Soviet Communist system?" ■

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to a minimalist humanitarianism. In response, Pogge and others have maintained the essentials of Rawls's thought—most of all, his social contract—but altered its scope. In a cosmopolitan age, they argue, everyone in the world must be seen as parties to the bargain over the principles of justice. National boundaries are merely the legacies of an arbitrary history rather than the bright lines of any fundamental moral map. Sen does not dispute the limitations of Rawls's complacency in an era of globalization. But, like his one-time associate Martha Nussbaum, he thinks the problem of global justice requires a very different fix to Rawls's system—in some ways, a more profound one.

Of the many arguments Sen offers, his weightiest is a defense of “comparativism” against Rawls's “transcendentalism”—the reckoning of next steps as superior to the perfection of blueprints. Indeed, Sen contends that the wishful desire to promote a principle of global justice surpassing nations reflects too much allegiance to Rawls's commitment to ideal schemes. Sen impishly wishes Pogge “good luck” in simply transferring Rawls's social contract to the global forum, in the absence of the robust coordinating authority of a world government. Recommending a different course of thought, Sen argues that if a theory of justice is concerned not with outlining distant utopias but with deciding among proximate alternatives (especially when they rule out manifest wrongs), the persistence of national politics need not be a fatal objection to the pursuit of cosmopolitan improvement. Political constraints that rule out global equality in a world of nation-states fade in their theoretical significance if justice itself is understood not as a system built from scratch but as a choice among options available in the world as it exists now.

The most fascinating passages in *The Idea of Justice*, therefore, are ones in which Sen methodically makes the case that “transcendent” utopias of the Rawlsian sort are neither possible nor necessary. One set of arguments says that theoretical agreement over first principles is not available—certainly not of the kind Rawls famously promised with his “original position,” which imagined an ideal situation of choice (which Pogge and others transfer upward to the global scene). “A diagnosis of perfectly just social arrangements is incurably problematic,” Sen insists. Anyway, he then argues, even if such a diagnosis were available, it is unclear how it would help, since policy choice is always between two or more proximate alternatives, and a revolutionary utopia would

provide no guidance about which foot to put forward first. More specifically, neither theoretical agreement nor any particularly grand scheme is needed to identify egregious wrongdoing. Finally, people's behavior is inescapably relevant to the reformer, making theories that fail to reckon with it useless.

Such arguments have an obvious appeal as a recipe for drafting a step-by-step agenda for the pursuit of justice, and Sen goes further in recommending his discipline of social choice (distinct from the very different academic enterprises known as rational choice and public choice) as a tool kit for analyzing different political options comparatively. As brilliantly carried off as it is, however, Sen's refutation of “transcendence” is unconvincing on a number of grounds. Most of all, it fails to acknowledge the diverse roles that theoretical options, beyond proximate, realizable ones, play in theory and practice.

In a somewhat technocratic mode, Sen treats the options presented in public debate as given in advance, as if coming up with a menu of options did not require inspiration. But even if Sen is right that transcendent schemes can play no direct role in adjudicating between local alternatives, it seems obvious that they have an important effect in helping to precipitate those alternatives. Much more important, utopias have always galvanized people to advocate even piecemeal reform in the unjust circumstances of the world as it is. Sen wants to reach the conclusion that the “hiatus” between his “relational approach” to justice and the “transcendental approach” is “quite comprehensive,” but he completely ignores the value of the transcendent as providing a fund of ideas and motivation. It is key to both the theoretical elaboration of and the practical quest for even proximate reforms.

Thus, even if Sen is right that a fetish for a “complete” blueprint of social justice is a distraction, it does not necessarily follow that confining inquiry into justice into a discussion of proximate options is the sole alternative. One of the attractions of his approach, of course, is that it provides a warrant for dropping scholastic controversy so that rival schools can converge in alleviating “manifest injustice.” But even such consensually supported goals have to be defined; even a world without slavery, to take Sen's favorite example, had to be imagined, and the energy for its achievement summoned and mobilized.

It's also worth stressing that Sen's approach works best when the injustice at issue is a geographically local or chronologically episodic one. The sad devastation of a hurricane or even a widespread horror like human

trafficking call for interventions that, no matter how difficult, are confined to the outrage at hand. Of course, such upheavals can end up revealing structural wrongs the public had preferred not to see—as in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. All the same, responding to a fundamentally systemic injustice like global poverty is inseparable from a more controversial positive agenda, in theory and practice; in modern times it has typically been a positive agenda of collective freedom. The main reason is that the campaign for social justice, especially on a global scale, intrudes too profoundly into the fundamentals of existing social arrangements not to make the most basic questions of justice pressing, and the rivalry of what one might call comparatively transcendent schemes hugely relevant. In Sen's thought, his famous proposal—further developed here—to make self-realization in all its multifaceted forms, or “capabilities,” the metric of justice could not but prompt an open-ended campaign for improvement far beyond assuaging the crying shame of manifest deprivation.

In this regard, Sen has just as interesting, if not as vexed, a relationship to modern social movements as Sandel. Large-scale mobilizations are arguably at the heart of what both imagine justice to involve, but they are not as well integrated into the theories as Sen and Sandel think. Sen acknowledges that indignation, not just argument, matters in imagining justice, though he concludes that such emotion is relevant only insofar as it can be translated into a comparison of available reforms. Just as Sandel praises the moral and even religious basis of campaigns for slave emancipation and civil rights, Sen cites them as examples of movements that abolished glaring evils. Sen has notably kind words for the alternative globalization movements of recent history. It is very doubtful, however, that such movements have worked by confining their claims to proximate fixes alone instead of by imagining distant utopias. The reverse is true, both throughout modern history and in recent times, as the slogan of alternative globalization—“another world is possible”—suggests. It is better to think of local comparison and grandiose ambition not as mutually exclusive, as strict alternatives, but as mutually necessary.

Like Sandel, finally, Sen is so wary of the definition of justice as social freedom that he fails even to acknowledge it, despite its modern standing and appeal. Sen repeatedly indicts Rawls's absolute preference for the value of personal liberty over “economic or social equity”—it is “ex-

tremist" and "overkill," he says—but only to emphasize a moderate version of it rather than to dispense with the dichotomy between liberty and society. Sen's dichotomy is a version of Sandel's: collective life is a means for the advancement of personal capacity and freedom, and no more.

For all their legitimate striving for participation in the eternal concerns of Plato and the Bible (and Akbar), Sandel and Sen are writing for a world in which academic philosophy has clearly taken on board the liberal victory over communism in the cold war and allowed it to shape the terms of the debate. (If there are figures in academic political philosophy who are exceptions, like the recently deceased G.A. Cohen, they are ones that prove the rule.) Whether or not the marginalization of justice as collective freedom is defensible, the striking fact is that for Sandel and Sen it just goes without saying.

If liberalism deserved to win its battle to the death with communism, the resulting constraints on liberal political thought are nevertheless not easily justifiable. The consensus is all the more striking since philosophy is intended to be more than a creature of its moment: it is not supposed to restate temporary biases as universal truths. While critical of the promulgation of "sterile utopia" in his field, Sandel acknowledges the risk that philosophy could degenerate into an apology for its time and place: "a self-consistent skein of prejudice," as he puts it. That risk will strike you as rather serious after reading these books, if you think the viability of an account of justice as collective freedom was not exclusive to communism and therefore did not expire with it. There have been, after all, democratic approaches to collective emancipation and social freedom, notably in the Anglo-American age of progressive reform, as well as around the world.

At the same time, the end of the cold war has forced liberal philosophy to reckon with phenomena it has not been particularly well suited to incorporate, in the variety of its revisions of and departures from Rawlsian thinking: most of all, the claims of diverse cultures and the deepening of scandalous economic inequality on a global scale. These phenomena are novel only for contemporary liberalism, not for other philosophical traditions or in the lives of ordinary people. Sandel and Sen have tried to adapt to these circumstances by plotting a different theoretical course, but it is one beset by a great tension. They esteem social movements as the most vital tribunes of justice but fail to honor the aspiration to collective freedom that has so often animated them. ■



Gen. David Petraeus (left) and Lt. Col. Ralph Kauzlarich at Forward Operating Base Rustamiyah in Baghdad, September 22, 2007

Across the Great Divide

by AKIVA GOTTLIEB

In Washington, they read. Foreign policy decisions made by men and women in suits, understandably too busy to embark on a fact-finding mission to every war zone, disaster area or human rights debacle, often depend on the labor of reporters (who report) and experts (who filter raw eyewitness accounts into something historically and politically resonant, primed for the partisan echo chambers). In October, in the thick of the Beltway debate over the best course of action in Afghanistan, the *Wall Street Journal* observed that White House and Pentagon policy-makers were studying two histories that draw divergent lessons from the Vietnam War. (The article did not challenge the plausibility of the Afghanistan-Vietnam analogy itself.) One, *Lessons in Disaster*, by Gordon M. Goldstein, warns about the dangers of accepting military advice as gospel; the other cautions against bowing to popular dissent and discontent when a counter-insurgency fight is still winnable. According to the *Journal*, the latter book, *A Better War*, by former Army lieutenant colonel and CIA official Lewis Sorley, had already "shaped the debate over the 2007 troop surge in Iraq: Military commanders and top Pentagon civilians pushed the book ardently on surge skeptics, winning important converts." Of the two books, *A Better War* was not the one positioned on President Obama's nightstand.

A study like Sorley's, although culled from oral interviews and tape recordings of combatants, still gets written at some remove from actual combat. Those who extrapolate policy from the author's conclusions are

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The Good Soldiers

By David Finkel.

Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 287 pp. \$26.

heading straight for its revisionist lessons without firsthand experience of the mistakes. The pain of combat is immediate, but the consequences of war can take decades to suss out—otherwise, Vietnam wouldn't be today's hot topic on Capitol Hill. The big question, for all the election-year calls to "support the troops" and "think of the soldiers," is whether the cognitive (and, of course, physical) distance between the volunteer forces who fight Uncle Sam's wars and the elected officials who declare war can ever be narrowed. Exploring that chasm is what gives the recent world-historically depressing British comedy *In the Loop*, which portrays the run-up to the Iraq War as a series of petty ego clashes between cynical spin doctors, its bitter kick.

Nations and their leaders have no more existentially fraught responsibility than their power to declare war. And in Washington, and everywhere else that isn't on the field of battle, we read, ideally, in hopes of discovering what war is like, though any soldier will tell you we can know nothing about what it is. Because to be sent to war is to be ordered to commit acts of justified murder.

With *The Good Soldiers*, David Finkel aims to say nothing more about war than can be said definitively. Finkel, a *Washington Post* reporter who was awarded a 2006 Pulitzer Prize for a series explaining a US-funded push for democracy in Yemen, embedded himself in the 2-16 Army infantry battalion (nicknamed the Rangers) in the spring of 2007, as it prepared to enter Iraq as part

of the last-ditch counterinsurgency mission known as “the surge.” The almost outlandish advance praise heaped on *The Good Soldiers* (Geraldine Brooks said it “may be the best book on war since the *Iliad*”) only serves to underscore the paucity of direct coverage of the soldiers during this war. And unadulterated views of war are ever harder to come by: the military recently tightened its regulations on photographing soldiers killed in action, and the Pentagon’s continued dependence on unmanned Predator drone attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan means that even soldiers aren’t seeing the full contours of the global battlefield.

As an embedded reporter, Finkel opts to remain invisible, unlike other journalists

The thirteen chapters of *The Good Soldiers* are masterworks of compressed narrative.

who have written distinguished material from inside Iraq, including Evan Wright, the author of *Generation Kill* (whose Marines open up to him when they discover he used to write for *Hustler*) and Dexter Filkins, author of *The Forever War*. Eschewing moral judgment, policy proposals and military technobabble, Finkel writes concisely and vividly about trauma and regret, leaving us defenseless against the steadily accruing collateral damage of combat. This is not a new story. Still, to borrow the first sentence of the Ford Madox Ford novel whose title Finkel’s reprises, this is the saddest story I have ever heard. Amid the protracted debate about troop deployments in Afghanistan that has considered seemingly every voice but that of the soldiers, *The Good Soldiers* offers a searing reminder of the human cost of escalation.

The book’s title, innocuous at first glance, is a provocation. With its echoes of the twentieth century’s “Great War”—Ford’s novel, published in 1915, is set on the eve of World War I—*The Good Soldiers* acknowledges the irony of a search for heroism in a conflict that conscientious observers had already written off as a mistake, and one that could no longer even hold the attention of the American public. It’s not that we are bored with battle. We just prefer a fight that’s gift-wrapped in nobility. Ken Burns’s fourteen-hour, seven-part documentary *The War*, a pie-eyed tribute to the heroes of World War II, captivated 18.7 million viewers on the first night it was aired in the fall of 2007, when the 2-16 was

not yet halfway through its tour. In *The Good Soldiers*, the Rangers mournfully refer to their colonel, Ralph Kauzlarich, as “the Lost Kauz,” a nickname that links him implicitly with a worthless war and a lame-duck president. But as the book’s first sentence makes clear, the soldiers weren’t calling him that on April 6, 2007, when Finkel first joined the 2-16. If this wasn’t the good war, they would still be the good soldiers who could stanch the bleeding of a mismanaged, trillion-dollar campaign and rescue Iraq from a dystopian nightmare.

If *The Good Soldiers* has staying power, it’s not as a historical document of the surge, even though that tactical sea change is the context for the question posed by the book’s title. The surge, which handed Bush’s mess to Gen. David Petraeus, a wartime leader with actual battlefield experience, would rekindle some of the messianic fervor that accompanied the taking of Baghdad in 2003.

Kauzlarich’s 800-troop battalion (average age: 19) thought its mission would entail the protection of supply convoys in western Iraq, but with the president’s announcement of “The New Way Forward,” the troops were headed straight to the heart of a de facto Iraqi civil war. “We’ll be the difference. My battalion. Mysoldiers. Me,” Kauzlarich thought. “Meaning restored,” Kauzlarich closed his eyes and thanked God.”

But despite the moral imperative of the surge, Finkel immediately twists the concept of wartime “good” into a cosmic joke. He weaves several set pieces around “it’s all good,” the mantra Kauzlarich repeats to himself to keep his thoughts about the war orderly and trim, at least in those supposedly halcyon days of April 2007. Kauzlarich says it waking up in the morning, inhaling the bitter Baghdad air. He says it while driving in his Humvee as he passes through neighborhoods where more and more improvised explosive devices are shredding the limbs, skin and torsos of American soldiers, and he says it when he learns that the 2-16’s deployment has been extended from twelve months to fifteen. “It could seem like a nervous tic,” Finkel writes, “or a prayer of some sort. Or maybe it was a declaration of optimism, simply that, nothing more, because he *was* optimistic, even though he was in the midst of a war that to the American public, and the American media, and even to some in the American military, seemed all over.” It’s all good, gung-ho, nowhere to go but up—all good, that is, until his first soldier dies,

US fatality 3,267 in a war of choice.

Kauzlarich, now 44, is the perfect tragic foil for a book that aims to drain war of its vitality. Full of optimism, a healthy dose of fear and unremitting respect for President Bush, the Kauz seems to incarnate the American fighting spirit. “There was an underdog quality to him, which made him instantly likeable, and a high-beam intensity to him, which at times would emanate from him in waves,” Finkel writes. “And if there were things the army resisted in him, there were things about the army that he resisted as well—insisting, for example, that he would never want a posting that would put him inside the Pentagon, because those postings often went to sycophants rather than to true soldiers, and he was a true soldier through and through.” In Finkel’s free indirect narrative style, it’s unclear whether we’re reading the imagined thrust of the colonel’s interior monologue or the author’s straightforward analysis; but either way, Kauzlarich is a recognizable amalgam of archetypes. He’s part Patton, whose men would readily do something dangerous “not out of intimidation but because they didn’t want to let him down,” and part Joe Sixpack, a husband and father of three, confident but scared, believing “in destiny, in God, in fate, in Jesus Christ, and in everything happening for a reason, although sometimes the meaning of something wasn’t immediately clear to him.”

In any war, the reporter stands in a privileged position, seeing many sides at once. Soldiers in the fight are too busy to cultivate an omniscient perspective, and the men and women back home can’t understand the desperate measure of sitting in a Humvee with one foot planted in front of the other, so that if a roadside bomb explodes it would destroy just one foot, not two. Finkel seems equally attuned to the prerogatives of bureaucrats, families and fighters, and recognizes the difficulty of empathizing with another point of view. “To [the soldiers], it was about specific acts of bravery and tragedy. The firefight in Fedaliyah—that was the war. Three dead inside a fireball on Predators—what else could a war be?” Finkel’s favorite rhetorical device is the sentence that slices a tragic trajectory through time, or compresses space to emphasize causality. “The soldiers of his who would be injured were still perfectly healthy, and the soldiers of his who would die were still perfectly alive.” When Kauzlarich’s first soldier dies, Finkel uses a single page to cut between the platoon sergeant writing an incident report, the battalion doctor finishing a death report, the Pentagon

preparing a news release and Kauzlarich on the phone preparing to answer a tearful mother's most anguished question: "Instantly," he said."

The thirteen chapters of *The Good Soldiers* are masterworks of compressed narrative. Each chapter is pegged to a single day of the 2-16's sixteen-month tour, and each is prefaced by a remark of Bush's about the surge that more often than not registers as hopelessly at odds with facts on the ground. One chapter begins with the president's statement, "I'm optimistic. We'll succeed unless we lose our nerve." This is how it ends, at the conclusion of another dead soldier's memorial service:

Here, six versions of what nerve can mean filed out of the chapel.

Mays went back to his Ambien.

Hamel went back to his furniture.

Bailey went back to his loops around the FOB.

Wheeler went back to his what-ifs.

March went back to his slide show.

And Kauzlarich, red-eyed too now, went back to his office.

When our men in Washington and Baghdad finally meet face to face, in a particularly compelling chapter chronicling Petraeus's visit to the battalion, Finkel exploits a cinematically precise juxtaposition of scale. Kauzlarich, a master of detail, prepares to brief the four-star general, who was by late 2007 an unlikely international celebrity, by ensuring the makeshift conference room is stocked with cookies, muffins, fresh fruit, coffee and Petraeus's standby, Diet Coke. When the megawatt general walks onto the scene, he expresses his gratitude for the spread by reaching for a single grape, and then gets down to business.

The meeting grows disturbing as it unfolds because Petraeus—so revered in news profiles (as well as Thomas Ricks's authoritative history of the surge, *The Gamble*) as a nuts-and-bolts counterpoint to Washington's clueless war hawks—is given a briefing that's an airbrushed version of what the infantry platoon has just been through. Eager to please his hero, Kauzlarich relays very little of his soldiers' actual difficulties with swaying Iraqi hearts and minds. It's a failure of communication that cuts both ways:

in the United States, where three dead on Predators might be mentioned briefly somewhere inside the daily paper under a heading such as FALLEN HEROES or IN OTHER NEWS, and the firefight in Fedaliyah

wouldn't be mentioned at all, it was about things more strategic, more political, more policy-driven, more useful in broad ways. Three dead? Yes, damn, how sad, and God bless the troops, and God bless the families, too, and this is exactly why we need to get out of Iraq, to honor the sacrifice, and this is precisely why we need to stay in Iraq, to honor the sacrifice, but you know what? Have you seen the numbers? Have you seen the metrics? Have you seen the trend lines?

The chasm between over here and over there is central to another heartbreaking sequence, when the wife of a severely wounded soldier transferred from Iraq to the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, remembers a visit from President Bush. Finkel recounts not only what the soldier's wife said to the president—"Thank you for coming"—and not only what she wished she had said to him—"He *doesn't* know how it feels"—but why she hadn't said it: "Because I felt it would not have made any difference." Communication is fruitless, because if Bush can't see the problem staring at him from that hospital bed, he's already living on too remote a planet.

Finkel rarely attempts to develop his soldiers as three-dimensional characters, but he uses scrupulous descriptions to establish the intimacy of danger. When a piece of shrapnel comes flying through a door, "it sliced through the metal frame of his bed, sliced through a 280-page book called *Learning to Eat Soup With a Knife*, sliced through a 272-page book called *Buddhism Is Not What You Think*, sliced through a 128-page book called *On Guerrilla Warfare*, sliced through a 360-page book called *Tactics of the Crescent Moon*, sliced through a 176-page *Calvin and Hobbes* collection, sliced through the rear of a metal cabinet holding those books, and finally was stopped by a concrete wall." Because this soldier was sleeping on his side, the shrapnel missed him by an inch. And so a new day begins. There's a reason these warriors cite *Groundhog Day* more often than *Black Hawk Down*.

The Good Soldiers has little to say about the plight of ordinary Iraqi civilians, most of whom remain inscrutable to the platoon, though at one point an exasperated Kauzlarich calls them "the most ungrateful fucks I've ever met in my life." But Finkel does dedicate a poignant chapter to the story of "Izzy," the platoon's fearless and indispensable Iraqi interpreter, paid between \$1,050 and \$1,200 a month to face all the risks of combat and then some, without even the

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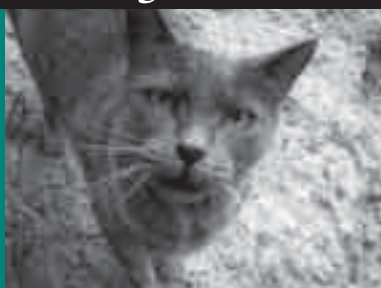
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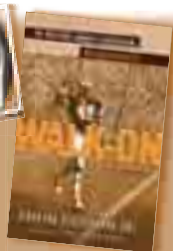
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mitigating benefits of military camaraderie. As an Iraqi, he can never truly become "one of them." And to fellow Iraqis, he's a traitor.

There is another, less flattering definition of a "good soldier," one that seems caught somewhere in Finkel's blind spot. Obedience to authority is a time-tested military credo, and those soldiers who rise to higher rank are the ones who respect the chain of command. Ralph Kauzlarich, the book's flawed but unequivocal hero, was also, at least at one point, this very type of good soldier.

In Afghanistan, in April 2004, Ranger Pat Tillman was accidentally killed by soldiers in his own platoon. (The Army initially asserted that Tillman was killed in an Afghan militia ambush.) The incident immediately drew media attention because eight months after September 11, Tillman had abandoned a promising professional football career (and a \$3.6 million contract) and enlisted in the Army alongside his brother Kevin. The same Kauzlarich of the 2-16 was the Army officer who directed the first official inquiry into Tillman's death. While he wrote a recommendation for Tillman's posthumous Silver Star—which helped spur a misleading, Jessica Lynch-style promotion of Tillman's death for political purposes—he did not push to find out the identity of the shooter. "I don't think it really matters," he told *ESPN Magazine*. Kauzlarich likely had good intentions, seeking to spare his troops any further emotional turmoil.

But in his zeal to protect the military, Kauzlarich wound up disparaging the family of a fallen soldier. In a brazenly tone-deaf statement, he said that the reluctance of Tillman's parents to accept the results of the military's investigation was the unfortunate result of their lack of Christian faith. (Kauzlarich is an evangelical Christian. Tillman was not religious.) As Kauzlarich told *ESPN*: "When you die, I mean, there is supposedly a better life, right? Well, if you are an atheist and you don't believe in anything, if you die, what is there to go to? Nothing. You are worm dirt. So for their son to die for nothing, and now he is no more—that is pretty hard to get your head around.... So I don't know how an atheist thinks. I can only imagine that that would be pretty tough." An outraged Representative Henry Waxman called the comments "crass" and "completely inappropriate," and officially requested that the Pentagon discipline Kauzlarich. To make things even worse, for himself and the armed forces, Kauzlarich acknowledged that Tillman's Silver

Star recommendation was an irregular decision. "I mean, had the story come out that he had been killed by his own guys, then it probably would have been looked at differently," he said.

The Pat Tillman saga is one of the most striking cautionary tales of the post-9/11 era, for the way it seems to reduce modern war to a hero industry—no different from Hollywood but with far more immediate and harmful ramifications. In this story, Kauzlarich was not one of the good guys. His role is mentioned in Jon Krakauer's comprehensive new book about Tillman, *Where Men Win Glory*, but Finkel elides Kauzlarich's minor infamy. In *The Good Soldiers*, Kauz's *ESPN* comments are folded into a paragraph about his general candor and honesty, and never mentioned again. For a book that seeks to dispense with euphemisms and bring the sacred soldiers back down to earth, the lack of interest in Tillman is baffling. (If ever there was an illustration of the gulf between battlefield objectives and Washington PR, this is it.) After all, with Kauzlarich at the helm, the 2-16 is not just some arbitrary battalion. Given Finkel's literary mindset, how could he not suspect that Kauzlarich—more "the lost Kauz" than the book lets on—might see the surge as an attempt to both win the war and rehabilitate his own image? The story of his involvement in the Tillman saga would have only further underscored the book's distinctive seeing-everything-at-once narrative dynamic. It's an untapped dramatic vein in an otherwise unflinching chronicle. One wonders if Finkel, bowing to military decorum by ignoring these extra layers, opted to play the good soldier himself.

As such, *The Good Soldiers* inadvertently acquires a cumbersome cloak of irony. It's a book about the illusory (or at least quotidian) nature of heroism that can't help but succumb to hero worship. From an embedded reporter thrown onto the battlefield with a pen and notebook, this worship is common; the men with guns are his only protection against a hellish environment. One could even infer a sort of wish fulfillment, because when your life is in danger you want to be surrounded by heroes. And this may be the *Washington Post* reporter's most profound takeaway from his trip across the great divide: that no amount of skepticism, critical distance or genuine awe can insulate you from the emotional bonds formed in combat. All faults and disagreements can fall away in a moment's euphoria, in that secret place where "war is hell" gives way to "it's all good." I imagine we'd have to be there to understand. ■

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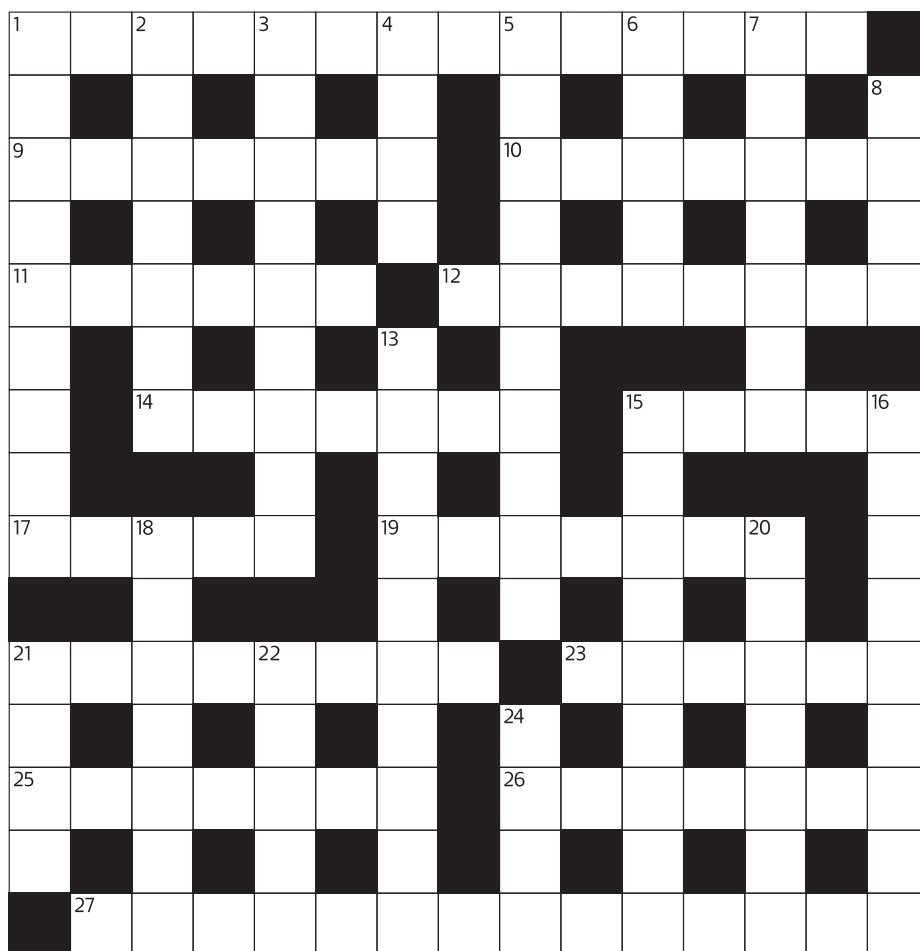
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ACROSS

- 1 Two points I start to get: sharpen weapons, speak carefully. (5,4,5)
 9 Kind of colored around it, as one did after making an error. (7)
 10 Some are said to be so in love! (7)
 11 and 12 Looking for such as dormers at a good price? (6-8)
 14 Something that sends things out with a German form in a chopped-up tree. (7)
 15 In charge of the hearth, what many a man wears with a good finish. (5)
 17 A girl who has a purpose with a couple of points? (5)
 19 Possibly in the etui they find a necessity with the French. (7)
 21 You could perhaps get sore this way—being rather pretty. (4,4)
 23 Just like the first man, am I surrounded by a bad cad? (6)
 25 Didn't she get tired, just sitting on a rock? (According to popular stories, with a bunch of flowers.) (7)
 26 What that cleaning powder is supposed to do. (7)
 27 The thoughtful insurance man probably did, before anything was signed—but it's a chance well taken. (10,4)

DOWN

- 1 and 21 What the testator probably does is carry on business with vigor. (4,4,1,4)
 2 One hears it's where campers hang out, very compactly. (7)
 3 Sounds "cool," with zero entanglements, to get one under your control. (9)
 4 Barely visible. (4)
 5 A rebel at one time. (10)
 6 The lowermost deck, which is otherwise cut off. (5)



- 7 The infant's rubber toys are just fond relatives to certain Brits. (7)
 8 English general and governor of Canada, otherwise sounds like you and I are out of buying. (4)
 13 Don't move! You don't like to see business come to one! (10)
 15 Made legitimate, but made David late, perhaps. (9)
 16 Sir Andrew has a fever with it, but only on part of the face. (9)
 18 Suggests a bad French vocal effort, which could knock you out! (7)
 20 Your uncle at the old town—first-class, but an old fighting type! (7)
 21 See 1
 22 Keepsake—some of which are licensed. (5)
 24 When the outgoing water comes up, go over the material so. (4)

CORRECTION: A typo wrecked the clue to 23 down in the November 30 puzzle (No. 3193). It should have read "Caught in trap *at* Hyderabad..."

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3193



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